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TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.



DIANA GAY ;

OR,

THE HISTORY OF A YOUNG LADY.

BY

PERCY FITZGERALD, M.A. F.S.A.

AUTHOR OF "NEVER FORGOTTEN," "THE LIFE OF GARRICK,"
ETC. ETC.

"For her 'tis one long summer's day ;
For her 'tis ever sun.
Round her do softest zephyrs play ;
Her do rude breezes shun.
She knows not sorrow, knows not pain ;
'Tis all a witching trance :
For her 'tis all a sweet low strain,
And life seems but a dance."
JOHN MARSHALL (1690).

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON :

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1868.

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DIANA GAY.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLD ROUND.

LADY MARGARET returned a little heated and put out. She had seen some people, and had come a little suddenly on a large tea-party, where she had met some odious people whom she disliked, and who she knew were enjoying the business. These, with a malicious interest, and a more malicious sympathy, condoled with her on this trial, and were malignantly curious about details. She thought, too, she was neglected, and postponed to a new and

wealthy lady who was rising on the horizon. The Pollexfen heiress, too, had not shown the interest she had counted on. Yet when she returned, and found Diana poorly, and with the troubled "scared" look on her face, she was touched, and ran to infold her in an embrace of rustling silk and lace.

"Poor child," she said, "now it will all come right; I know it will!"

On that night they were to go on the invariable and never-failing "parade," as one of the old officer-friends called it; and the young Lord Patmore was to attend them.

"The boy is always late," said Lady Margaret; "and we shall be half an hour on the stairs."

She was right. They had to wait some ten or twelve minutes or so after the hour. She had made the great argosy wait at the door; and then a note was brought in to Diana. It ran:—

“DEAR MISS GAY,—I am obliged to go to the country to-night on business, and cannot go with you to the ball. Pray excuse me to Lady Margaret Bowman. I am not well. “PATMORE.”

Lady Margaret gave a sort of snort. “Not well: fiddle-de-dee! This is some of his wretched acting and clever little trickery, as he thinks it.”

Diana, dressed for the sacrifice, coloured, but tossed her head scornfully. “We don’t want him at all,” she said; “and, thank Heaven, I never did. I understand —”

“Nonsense, dear,” said Lady Margaret; “you do not. Keep up your heart, you know, before those people; for they’ll be watching you, dear, and making out all sorts of things. I know that wretched Wally Pepys has been inventing all sorts of lies, just to give himself importance, and get a dinner in return for his information; so, dear, don’t be looking dejected, but dance away merrily.”

With this judicious encouragement they entered the arena; but Diana's attempt at looking indifferent only produced a scornful expression on her pretty mouth. She fancied every one was looking at her. In reality the world does not care so much for us, and our concerns, as to let even the enjoyment of our coming misfortune interfere with their regular sports. The story was whispered about, "That's the young girl spoken of in the *Regent-street Chronicle*. It's all coming on next month."

Several of her and Lady Margaret's friends and male retainers, as they might be called, were away, or obliged to go to some other party, which accidentally made the night scarcely so triumphant as had been some others. It looked like neglect; and Diana said to herself bitterly, "O, how like this cruel world!"

Lady Margaret was out of humour. There had been also some *mal-entendu* about her midnight meal.

As we have said, there was no conspiracy, nothing cruel ; but Diana's gentle sensitiveness seemed to detect a change. Still, here was a good-natured face, a little spare figure, in front of Diana, who had just come back from a rather dismal dance. It was Sir John Williamson, the Attorney-General. Yonder was Lady Jane "instructing counsel," that is, surrounded with admiring gentlemen. Sir John had to go out now and again, just as the carriage and servants would be ordered at eleven o'clock. He bore it very well, and indeed was rather proud of his showy lady.

He took Diana's hand cordially. "Dancing away," he said. "I wonder what dancing is like. I would give the world to know the feeling, the enjoyment. Will you come down and have an ice? No, I am not ornamental enough?"

"Delighted," said Diana, with alacrity ; "what an unkind speech !"

"So we are going to have a little law-

suit," he went on as they descended. "My poor child, to pick you out to be worried in this way! Well, I am not going to worry you either; but you know this is all in my trade. Now tell me about it," he added seriously. "I want to know; for I have great interest in you, my dear child, and we must do our best for you."

"O, how kind of you, Sir John!" said Diana. "But it is so sudden, and it has frightened me, you know." I am alone, I may say, and have so few to turn to, since—since my poor darling left me."

"Nonsense; you have plenty. Tell me, would you be afraid to pay a busy man a visit in his own study to-morrow morning, and we'll talk it over seriously?"

Diana's eyes brightened.

"You are so good, Sir John. Indeed I will. That is, though, I have nothing to tell as yet; but they are going to make it all out."

"Very well," he said; "we can put it off until they do make it out. Just tell your

solicitor, when he has his case pretty well ready, to send the papers, and I'll give you a good opinion—at least as good as is going. Don't think of it a moment. Those things are very likely made up to extort money. There, there's Welbore coming to claim you."

This comfort put Diana quite in spirits again, and the kindness of the great law-officer's manner quite comforted her. "I will come, indeed," she said; "and it is so good of you." Then they went home.

Sir Duncan Denison, physican-in-ordinary to the Queen, had been calling in occasionally at Lady Margaret's, and in his playful fashionable way, so as not to give alarm to anybody, had warned her—his finger up—about the "fulness," and those "dangerous dinner-parties."

"A year in one of those ascetic monastic orders, my dear Lady Margaret," he said, "would do us all a world of good."

Lady Margaret, indeed, thought poorly of

the faculty; they were “all fiddle-de-dee, my dear;” and she only tolerated her friend Sir Duncan for the gossip he brought “from those little dark dens at St. James’s,” and above all, from Hampton Court, where he had a large *clientèle* among the honourable spinsters, and lean and slippered pantaloons of quality, who were there *en pension*.

He was “the most agreeable creature, my dear.” He had always some bit of sweetbread in his pocket—that is, a succulent morsel of scandal—that was singularly toothsome. The doctor himself relished it quite as much; was, indeed, as his friends said, a true old woman of the Court; and after the first minute or two forgot his profession, and was in an easy-chair, pouring out his stores of news.

Lady Margaret, laughing at his warning, had this season made one of her most vigorous campaigns in the dinner-party way. Having “got Bowman” to take the house,

she enjoyed the novelty, and, as it were, made up for past and lost time. Very soon she had forgotten Diana's trouble, that spectral sword which was hanging over the young girl's head, and gave that worn and troubled look to those bright eyes.

"My dear," said Lady Margaret, "I suppose it will all come right. These are some low creatures, depend upon it; and this is their story."

She had been worried herself a good deal of late. Bowman was talking about the expense, and the bills were coming in; that for the argosy and the great horses had "on job" was frightful. But there was a great business approaching—a select and royal ball, given in honour of the Prince of Rumpenböttel, who, it was supposed, wished for one of the junior English princesses for his son, and it was thought was very likely to succeed. He had brought his son—Fritz—a long, yellow, hulking young German, and everything was going on prosperously, the

ground being indeed smooth, laid out in velvet grass, from the known partiality of the English nation for these sort of alliances.

There was one ball given at the palace to the regular crowd, the genteel rank-and-file, when the grand staircase and the “splendid suites of rooms,” &c., were thrown open, “and the place really swarmed, my dear, with members,” and the commoner sorts of lords. But there was to follow a far choicer and more restricted business—the line to be drawn, the gilt cord stretched across; and to get inside, under, or even stride over this barrier, if it could be done with decency, was the struggle now going on. It was, according to Lady Margaret’s favourite phrase, to be “all the elect and select, my dear.”

In nearly every “set,” circle, or community, each person has certainly a fellow, or family, with a particular and odious relation to him or her—the rock ahead, as the gentlemen of tragedy would call it—a sort of

Grundy, which rises, Jack-in-the-box-like, at every moment the other wishes to rise, and thus gets in the way of the light or the warmth, or any advantage that may be coming. In short, these are really the persons "made for each other;" and every one of us has this mysterious relation to some obstructive. Do we wish to quaff the cup of bliss, they must go near to snatching it from us, or at least put their detestable lips to it at the same moment, when it becomes as good as poisoned. When the bliss has not yet come, but coming, we see their shadow on the ground gradually enlarging. It is an eternal struggle; sometimes we vanquish them, but oftener they us. They are a sort of monster we cannot get rid of. We are fastened to each other according to the rule of the Danish punishment, and can only hew each other to death. Lady Margaret Bowman and Lady Mantower were in precisely this relation.

This "Mantower woman," as Lady Mar-

garet called her, "had of late grown to a pitch that was becoming unbearable." Lady Margaret would swell and turn pink, and flush up hotly, as she spoke of her. She confronted Lady Margaret everywhere. She had more than her usual success, and Lady Margaret more than usual ill-luck. And here was this German ducal ball, which Lady Margaret Bowman "was moving heaven and earth" to get to, as the phrase runs, and for which that tremendous form of exertion had not helped in her the least. From Mr. Penguin, "who was about the Court," had come one morning a fatal reply—as it might be from the Home Secretary announcing that the law must take its course—and all hope had fled. She was deeply mortified. It was just like Bowman—good for nothing always—a man with all his county interest, and yet whom they no more regarded than if he was an old hunting-whip. The mortification seemed to take hold of her mind; and while poor little Diana

needed all the comfort of talk and sympathy in her trouble, Lady Margaret would wander off to what she called this insult.

There was one of the usual dinner-parties coming on—cast in a mould, all in one piece, as it were: figures, company, table, attendants *en bloc*—so little variation was there—at the Mark Antrobus's. The same typical men and women; the same dresses, “low necks,” and what she would have called “tow-row” headdresses. The argosy came rolling and swinging up as usual, opened its porthole, and banged off its heavy steps, and groaned and reeled as its portly captain descended heavily; then righted with a spring of relief when she was on shore. Diana, duly attendant, stepped out lightly, and seemed to fly to the landing-place. It was the old form of entrance, the old simpering and welcome, the eternal pattern. When these veterans of society are in honourable *retraite*, how confused must be the retrospect—the past seeming to go round

before their eyes, like that toy called the zoetrope, and showing confused dinner after dinner, that seem to "run into each other" with bewildering monotony.

It was a very stately dinner, the Antrobuses being wealthy and important people, —highly fashionable too. Diana was very silent, yet never so interesting, as the young gentleman who took her down thought, and who did his utmost to cheer her, and perhaps to make himself agreeable. Alas, she had not seen the evening number of the *Regent-street Chronicle*, the lively gentleman's paper, which seemed to keep its eye, as it were, on the case, and which gave now and again some mysterious bit of information about it, acquired no one knew how. Nearly every one in the company had seen it save Lady Margaret and her *protégée*, the former being about as likely to look at a newspaper as at a law-book: except indeed that Diana had to read out that one column in the *Morning Plush*, where the

list of company, &c. was given. This little paragraph ran thus :

“It seems the *affaire* Gay progresses. We understand that within the last week a new and important link in the chain of evidence has been discovered. Those who have seen the plaintiff say that the likeness to the late Mr. Gay is something striking. The defendant’s solicitor is on the Continent looking for facts ; for the sake of the fair tenant in possession, it is hoped he will find none of the proverbially stubborn ones.”

CHAPTER II.

LADY MARGARET RETIRES.

HAD anyone told of or shown this statement to Lady Margaret, it would have had little effect on her. Her mind was full of one subject — her rock ahead was there, sitting opposite, though she, Lady Margaret, had at least the satisfaction of being taken down before her. The “odious Mantower” was in great spirits, cordial even to her enemy, who little divined the reason of this hilarity. The former was quite cowed by this persecution. Diana noticed the growing colour in her cheeks, and that she did not speak much, but seemed quite to forget the wholesome caution of the Court Doctor. The “odious Mantower” was a tall, angular

woman, whose daughters, long like herself, were dispersed round and about the table, "jerking their necks like storks," so had their enemy thus unkindly described them. This elation disturbed Lady Margaret.

Presently, when the ladies had removed to the drawing-room, and were resolved in that committee of the whole house, and had commenced their mysterious Eleusinian mysteries of which the writer dare not speak, and hath no knowledge, suspecting that if mortal man were to intrude he would be justly sacrificed, again Lady Mantower broke out. The subject was the ducal ball, introduced by the lady of the house.

"We are not fine enough, it seems," she said, "for these German people. As they did not think of us, it was not worth taking trouble about."

Nearly every one joined in this judicious way of viewing the matter. Lady Margaret spoke of the whole with a sort of scorn.

“Your girls like this sort of thing,” said the hostess to Lady Mantower; “and it will amuse them.”

“Yes,” said Lady Mantower; “they sent us an invitation. I am sure Rose and Mary will enjoy seeing the young prince. It was so nice of them, so kind, was it not?—I thought you were going,” she added, turning to Lady Margaret. “But they tell me it is very difficult to get there.”

It was notoriously hard to make that lady stagger under any blow; but she did on this occasion. It was the last straw; her presence of mind had all but given way, and she had nearly said, “What! you asked! it’s false!” But the gentlemen were coming up, clustering each to some lady’s feet with the old fatuous smile, as who should say, “How droll I am! what funny creatures we are!”

Diana noticed that Lady Margaret had a wild and confounded look, and seemed more flushed than she had perceived before. She

had even observed with disquiet that *too* hearty meal, and determined that when they got home she would really get on some of her little coaxing ways—as it were, ornaments—and speak seriously, and implore her for her own sake to mind what Sir Duncan had said. Lady Margaret was so very full in person ; that large figure was stored with all sorts of unwholesome juices.

In due time they were going out to the argosy, shining and glittering in the lamp-light, Lady Margaret leaning heavily on Antrobus. Down went the steps, “thud, thud,” like clods on a coffin.

“Such a pleasant evening!” said Lady Margaret, according to her old mechanical formula—and which she would have said still, had she been sitting the whole night long on St. Lawrence’s gridiron—“really charming!”

“So glad you liked it,” said Antrobus. “And I hope, Miss Gay—” Diana was tolerably well trained also :

“ I liked it so much ! ”

Then they rolled away home. Then Lady Margaret burst out in a fury.

“ Who is she ? What does she mean ? You heard all that ? Nice pass things are coming to. But I’ll expose her ; I know things about her—things if they were known, she daren’t set her foot in the palace. They’d turn her out.”

Diana had never heard her speak so excitedly.

“ Don’t think of it, dear,” she said ; “ it’s not worth—”

“ Not worth, child ! ” said Lady Margaret. “ How can *you* know ? Though, indeed it’s getting not to be worth, when creatures of that sort—” Here she became silent.

Diana wondered at the excitement, at the trembling voice, and at this way—unusual with Lady Margaret—of looking at such a thing as a calamity.

On rolled the argosy, swinging round corners, flashing a blaze into some pedes-

trian's eyes like a mammoth policeman, and finally drew up at their house in Portman-square. Instantly the hall-door flew open, the steps were down, and Diana had fluttered out "like a bird," as her admirers would say. Lady Margaret's descent was always a more laborious and tedious business. "Jeames" or Thomas was ready, standing in all his height and majesty, his strong arm bent forward, which her ladyship used to clutch and grasp almost convulsively as she came out, a process against which "Jeames" made many a "servants'-all" protest, as being "houtreegious, reely;" protesting that "a man's harm hain't quite a balluster." But on this night Jeames's arm remained bent for some seconds, and her ladyship never stirred. Diana's little white figure was seen in the hall, waiting to receive her.

The great menial had come up the steps with a scared stride, to fetch a lamp, for the large figure within the argosy was quite

at rest, and never stirred. Down fluttered her ladyship's maid, and figures from below came rushing up; and some people in the street stopped and lingered curiously as they saw the lamp brought out, and the young girl in a cloak on the steps, and then the figure carried in.

Sir Duncan was roused up from his bed, and came in a surprisingly short time. In a moment he was at work, and in a moment had comfort for the agitated girl.

"A stroke," he said; "but a desperate hard one. I told her of this again and again. You see she breathes. We may do something yet." And with the usual fiery remedies he laboured hard; and before morning Lady Margaret was alive again.

Bowman had been telegraphed for. With the day other physicians came and gathered round her. Diana—infinately relieved when they told her that all danger was gone, but that "we must be most careful"—saw now quite another Lady Margaret sitting up

there before her ; one who seemed as though some ruins had fallen on and crushed her. There was another face, bloodless, and altered in shape ; and she was almost scared to see how the mouth hung down at one corner, and what a dull, stony stare came into the eyes at times.

Under such a trial there was but one course, Sir Duncan said,—to go abroad and “drink waters,” and at once, without a second’s delay. So had ended what might be called the fourth act of Lady Margaret’s life: the next would languish through, without interest or business. Indeed, it was full time that the curtain should come down. She could now only speak in strange indistinctness ; her images of “the odious Mantower” and her rivalry had passed away ; the great ducal ball, where that enemy had flourished, was over, and was as nothing ; all was changed. The mansion was being given up hurriedly ; great trunks were in the hall ; “Jeames” had received

notice; the argosy and tall horses had gone home. Diana, sitting up half the nights, the most tender and solicitous of nurses, would have gone anywhere with her to continue those offices of devotion. But that could not be; she could not be away from her suit. A hired nurse had come into office; this trained service was indispensable. As many friends said, "God help poor Bowman!" who never did a thing for himself in his life.

There, however, was to be left our Diana, without a substantial female friend to turn to. To whom could she go? There she was to be, in that hired house, which she had taken, a dismal prospect before her, with coming dangers and a new world. Trials and troubles seemed to be crowding on her. At last it was the night of the departure of the Bowmans, and it had grown nearly dark. She was sitting with the helpless lady upstairs, when word was brought that Captain Lugard was

below. He had been away with his regiment.

“Diana,” he said eagerly, “I only heard two days ago; but they would not let me go. I have come the moment I could get free. What are these people going to do with you? Surely not leaving you here?”

“They must go,” said Diana. “Poor Lady Margaret dare not stay.”

“But what is to become of you? My God! have they not thought of that? Do they mean to cast you off, now that they have no more use for you? Have you thought of yourself, dear Diana?”

Diana looked at him, a little scared. She had not thought of this; she was not selfish.

“I must stay here, of course,” she said.

“You! a young girl; impossible! No; I have thought of it—very anxiously too. You *must come to me*—to us—your old friend, that has your interest at heart.”

“O no!” said she, “that could not be.”

“Could not be!” said he; “perhaps so. But where will you go, Diana? What is to become of you? Think of your enemies; think of the net that is gathering about you, a young girl, alone, without any friends. Ah, you must think of this. With us you will have your old Kitty—Kitty Crowder.”

This struck Diana.

“Indeed, I am very unfortunate,” she said, a little helplessly; “and I don’t know what to do. But you said *enemies*. I have done nothing to any one that I know of.”

“Think; just think, then. Is there no one that hates me, and hates you?”

“Robert Bligh? O, he would not harm me. I am sure at this moment if he knew—”

“Will nothing convince you?” said Lugard, impatiently. “But, thank heaven! we have the proofs at last. Page came back last night, and has traced all. He will be here in a few minutes, and you shall know from his own lips. There!”

There was a step on the stair, and Mr. Page entered. He greeted Diana with his old air of lowly subservience.

“Now, Page,” said Lugard impatiently, “you are just in time. Tell what you have found out, and speak plainly.”

“I always do,” said the other, coldly, “on business matters. I shall not trouble Miss Gay with details unless she wishes it; but if she will allow me to summarise the matter in a sentence or two—”

“Yes; tell me quick, is it good or bad?”

“It is satisfactory, as far as it is certain and can be depended on. I have all the papers here, chapter and verse, page and line; and it comes to this—to what I thought.”

“And to what *I* thought, and what I said all along,” said Lugard. “Allow me, please. It comes to this, I say; whether it be a conspiracy, whether there is any case or not, the whole has been got up by the Bligh family.”

“What?” said Diana, timidly. “O no! Surely not. But have you proof?”

“As I live, yes; indeed, it is notorious at Boulogne. It was not difficult to find. Mrs. Bligh has been there months, hunting up this, hunting up that. She has succeeded so far. Her son—”

“No; not Robert?”

“Yes; I met him in the packet coming back. I suppose, after having arranged his work. The mother and he had been settling their plans together. It was she who found out this girl in a convent; indeed, she makes no secret of it. But I have all the proofs.”

“O, how cruel, how wicked!” cried Diana; “and I never injured them.”

That night, as Diana was watching beside Lady Margaret, the picture of herself in her desertion and desolation came back upon her very forcibly. She shrank from it with a sort of terror. Above all, she was now filled with a warm resentment and indigna-

tion against the mother and son who could be thus vindictive. She felt her spirit rise, and was ready to meet their attacks as boldly. Before the next evening she had agreed to accept the asylum which her old, kind, and true friends had offered to her; for she saw at last how sensible was Lugard, and how truly he had divined what she had never seen herself.

It did look suspicious, all but convincing. Mr. Page, returning home from Boulogne, had actually met Robert Bligh on the deck of the packet, and recognised at once so well-known and "rising" a junior.

CHAPTER III.

A BONE OF A FAMILY SKELETON.

AFTER Robert's last interview with Diana, he had gone home to a great brief, which was ready waiting to absorb, and even to devour him. But he could not shut out what *would* come between his eyes and his papers—the strange discovery he had made that day. All through the fluttering leaves of Cox and Malagrida (he was for the respondents, and would have to open their case before the Vice-Chancellor the following day), he was pursued by this disturbing notion. Pity, sorrow—and perhaps the old love, which he could not extinguish so readily as he imagined—that terrible and

sudden reverse for one so young, so innocent, so full of hope and beauty, and enjoyment of all the pleasant things of the world—quite took hold of him, and kept him in a reverie, thrusting out the obtrusive “respondent” Malagrida, and by midnight scarcely “a single fact” had been taken in. All that he had heard came floating between his mind and it, and distracted his attention. He had a strange and secret conviction that what had been charged was quite true—that Mrs Bligh had some part in this surprising turn. Her awful and mysterious allusions to punishment, her invocations of vengeance on Diana’s head, now recurred to him. He knew how firm of purpose, how unrelenting even, she was; and he recalled that, when he had asked about the object of her visit to Boulogne, she had answered bluntly and curtly, “that she had a good reason for going there.” Then came a crush of business, increasing with him every day, and he had little time to think or speculate.

He had a certain instinct—such as never failed him in doubtful cases—that there was something real and substantial at the bottom of this suit with which poor Diana was menaced. The skilled lawyer, at the first glance, often feels such an inspiration, which rarely misleads. But still it was only too likely that Mrs. Bligh would not be checked by any consideration which stood in the way of her purpose. He had clear and certain recollections of little passages in old days of his boyhood; and though he loved and respected her, he knew her character and her iron purpose in such matters as well as though she were a witness and in the box under his treatment.

The evening mail had been just brought in to him, generally half-a-dozen letters strong. The morning one was by far the heavier. There was one letter on thin post-paper, and covered over with the parti-coloured blue and orange stamps and smirched marks which betray the foreign

letter. It was from Mrs. Bligh : he opened it eagerly, for it came *apropos*.

“MY DEAR CHILD,”—it ran,—“you have heard by this time of what has overtaken her. Was I a true prophet? I told you vengeance would overtake her, and it has. Nor do you imagine, nor let her and *her friends* persuade you, that it is a mere idle menace—a thing that will blow over, or that will be proved to be a low trumped-up matter to extort money. She may tell her friends so, and they will tell her; but it is nothing of the kind, *as I know*, and as the world will know by and by.”

Robert Bligh did not read any more ; this convinced him. Within half an hour his resolution had been taken. He had sent Malagrida back to his solicitor, naming a friend who was ready to take it up ; and by the first continental train next morning was hurrying down to Folkestone. By the after-

noon he was gliding into the bright and theatrical port of Boulogne, looking at its gay colours and unfamiliar faces.

The gossiping exiles of that pleasant place of refuge, the lively natives and good-natured shopkeepers, had long noticed—the former with an exaggerated curiosity, the latter with the polite toleration of citizens of the world—the austere and ascetic-looking female who had come to live among them for a short while, and who was restlessly going about making some mysterious inquiries. The English expatriated at first could not make her out, and offered their usual advances; but when her hostile manner and cold *accueil* had firmly repelled them, became (also as usual) her determined foes. Many were the circumstantial stories sent round: she had fled from her creditors—her daughter had run away with a music-master, “an awful business”—with more ingenious fables. The French, as we said, were utterly incurious; but noticing that she was a good

deal with a certain aged abbé, who lived *en retraite*, as it were, in a modest lodging in the *haute ville*, quietly set her down as a *devote enragée*, who had been in youth and in middle age equally “enraged” for pleasure, and was now only taking the usual French course.

Devotion at Boulogne was the amusement of old age, as pleasure had been of youth and maturity. Every day had its season according to this philosophic people, who were content with quiet solutions of things, and did not seek to penetrate deep for mysterious secrets. It was presently known that the stranger had gone away to Amiens, and that she had returned; but some (English) curiosity was deservedly excited when old Captain Filby reported that he had seen Dubosc—the retired police-officer—pay her a visit. This state of observation continued for some weeks, until the handsome Mrs. Fazakerly and her husband arrived and began “to dash out,” as it was

called, and all the broken down "pack" harked away on that scent, and to a new cry. Another month went by, and it was all forgotten; until the same Captain Filby told one evening, at the Club, that he was sure old "Bonaparte's" son had arrived—such was the disrespectful name he had given the lady, from her peculiar cast of features—as he had overheard him give that name to the passport-fellow in the office.

Mrs. Bligh was sitting in one of the bright and cheerful rooms that give on the hill, which is called the Grande Rue, when a native maid entered with news that there was a gentleman below.

Mrs. Bligh was never startled: she did not start when he entered, though a faint tinge of colour came into her grim cold cheeks. She welcomed him as though they had parted, not indeed the day before, but perhaps the week before; there was that measure of warmth in her reception. But Robert fancied he saw a sort of distrust or

inquiring challenge in her face, as who should say, "Why have you come? what is it brings you?"

They sat down together, mother and son, and he talked of what he knew would please and interest her—his own prospects and success. The dinner came; and when the maid had gone he came at once gravely to the subject he was full of. Almost at once, and even before he began, her manner changed: she composed herself to a stiff and hostile attitude.

"This dreadful news," he said, "about poor Diana—"

She interrupted him. "Yes, got my letter? Yes! dreadful for her, if you will."

"Dreadful for all who have an interest in a poor, helpless, friendless child.

"I see—not cured yet. You have seen her, I suppose, since she learned this?"

"Yes, for a short time."

"Of course. And I suppose she went through her old course of histrionic tricks

—her tears and helplessness? She can do all that business well.”

“On the contrary, mother, I must tell you she gave me no such reception; but made the most cruel charges—which, Heaven knows, I do not deserve.”

Scorn and rage came into Mrs. Bligh’s face. “And she dares to keep this up still—the artful, designing, ill-conditioned creature! But she shall be brought down; and brought low. I tell you so, Robert. For these years of insult and insolence, which she thinks all sport and innocence, she shall soon atone; and, if we wish it, we can make her come grovelling to our knees, Robert, to beg mercy. I promise you *that*, Robert—I, your mother—and I never yet promised what I did not perform!”

There was a silence. Robert made a motion to speak, but restrained himself. He looked at her doubtfully.

“This is what I have always deprecated,” he said. “I want no vengeance and no

punishment; besides, what can we do? This will turn out a mere vain menace; one of those schemes to get money to which many families have been exposed."

His heart misgave him later for thus trying diplomacy with her; but he wished to know more. She was so eager, that she thought the chance of failure was the only thing that stood in the way of his adhesion. She began at once.

"Tell me first about her—what she said, what she dared to say. Were there no signs of repentance or grace—no promise of the old love?"

"My dear mother, we have done with that long ago."

"Then I tell her she may have done with it, but not with the consequences. You and I shall live to see her begging yet; coming to you a reduced girl, asking you to get her into some decent family as a governess, to earn her bread. She will think of the old love then; but it will do her no

good. Never fear, Robert; She will rue that day yet."

"How do you know all this?" he said abruptly.

"Ah, Robert, what have I come here for? What have I been doing these six weeks past? What have I been hunting up night and day—dreaming of? What have I despaired of finding, but have found at last? I found it though."

"What, mother?"

"Listen," she said, "Robert. Draw in your chair close. You shall know the whole; what it has cost me so much trouble day and night to make out."

"No, mother, I do not want to know. I can have nothing to do with this; and warned you that I could not."

"Folly!" she said, contemptuously. "But you shall; you must see what a net I have woven about her, and she shall never break through it."

Robert Bligh—faintly protesting—then

had to listen ; for he felt, or at least this seemed to be his excuse, that he must save her from herself. Curiosity also was at work. This was the story she told him.

CHAPTER IV.

A PIECE OF FAMILY HISTORY.

SOME five-and-thirty years before, the colonists found among them a fair and good-looking young man, with a pleasant laugh and a hearty, careless manner, who, in a very short time, grew to be liked by a good many. His name was Burgess; and as he seemed to have some money, and spent it freely in entertaining friends, he was considered delightful. No one thought of asking who Mr. Burgess was, from whence he came, or why he stayed there, —questions tacitly avoided in the place, unless a man had become generally odious, and there was an object in putting him down. Then malignity stopped at nothing;

and when the truth could not be found, falsehood and invention did just as well.

Young Captain Burgess soon came to be one of the "leaders" of the society there, such as it was, and had soon commended himself to the young ladies of the place. His free, joyous manners were found delightful, and his forwardness not impudence or familiarity, as they would have appeared in some one less gifted. He presently became a very wild young man, and soon the rumour went abroad of scrapes and riots and foolish escapades, at which the English chaplain used to shake his head with pity.

The little Boulogne theatre led a sort of stagnant dramatic existence, whose players held much the same relation to other places as the audience did to the town itself, and who were thus, as it were, exiled from their native dramatic country. The French found their way there, and were amused; but the English were very contemptuous

in their estimation of the performances, and were perpetually and unfairly comparing it with "the King's Theatre" at home, or Covent Garden. Young Burgess sometimes strolled in,—once or twice "got up a row," and was dragged out ferociously by the gendarmes.

At last it was known that the "administration" had engaged a dancer,—tenth-rate, perhaps, but still with good looks,—"the Duval," as she was called; and this quickened the languid curiosity of the English. She was pronounced by those judges "very fair on the whole;" and was, indeed, bold enough in her generation. Mr. Burgess was soon found to be one of her most ardent admirers, going every night, applauding noisily, to the disgust of the French, throwing bouquets, and fairly getting into a fresh quarrel with some man who had shown signs of disapprobation. He was seen on the Port walking with this ballerina, and scandalised the not-

easily-scandalised company of the place. She was a bold, painted, flaring creature; but, whatever was the secret, she had made a conquest of the young Englishman; and very soon, when her engagement was over, a most delicious morsel of news, more toothsome than the *sucre d'orge* to be bought at the corner shop, was sucked and enjoyed for many days. Captain Filby discovered that "the poor fool" *had actually married the girl*. The amazement may be conceived. The conventionally "happy pair" had gone away, her engagement having terminated, to some other town, and were not heard of again for a very long time.

Now Mrs. Bligh takes up the story, and shall tell the rest herself.

"I was at this time, Robert, in London, not yet married, and my greatest friend in the world, though she was many years older, was Laura Gay, one of the most resolute, unflinching women in the world, with a will and purpose worth that of a

dozen men. It was she who did *all* for those Gays, and but for that gallant working creature, who laid her whole soul and mind to this one end, of raising up the family from the difficulties in which they were steeped, that girl, who now behaves with all this pride and insolence to you, would have been a pauper. Laura's husband was a poor weak creature, with no more brains than a monkey, and she ruled him for his own advantage. Gradually the estate got cleared; the old load of building-debt was paid off. She got him back to their old place in the country, and she actually had things in train to get an old baronetcy revived; for she was the proudest creature, and looked to position as the first thing; and though she was not young, had the most surprising influence over political men.

“Often she talked to me over these schemes of hers. ‘If I had only materials!’ she would say; ‘but what can I do

with *him*?' Her eldest son, who was in the army, was a wild scapegrace,—very delicate in appearance, but in reality strong; she often talked with me over him, and I could see all her thoughts turned to her second sensible and steady son. 'He cannot live,' she would say;—'I know he will drink himself to death. Perhaps it will be the best for himself in the end; for if he ever comes into the property, he will waste and ruin everything. He has no head, no wits; he does not like me, and I do not like him; and it would be a mercy.'

"Suddenly, one day, news arrived from the colonel of the regiment of a serious scandal—that young Gay had 'broken out,' had behaved in the most outrageous way, had set his colonel at defiance, and finally had gone off, leaving regiment, connections, &c., without leave or notice. No one knew what had become of him. The news was in all the papers, to her rage and mortification; the disgrace and publicity wrung her

very heart. Yet I think she felt some comfort when she heard he had gone to the colonies—to the backwoods; for she was sure he would never be heard of again. I know what you are thinking of, Robert—how like she was in some things to *your* mother; and so she was: and that was one reason of our friendship.

“For some years he never was heard of, and this girl’s father was now being brought up as the heir. But one day she came rushing to me with a letter. ‘I knew it—I knew it!’ she said. ‘It was too great a blessing for me. I have had none all through my weary life.’ She showed me the letter. It was from Boulogne—from him—saying that he was ill and *deserted*, imploring her to come to him, and that he had not long to live. She begged of me, if I would do her a service, to go with her; and I agreed.

“It was a weary journey, and all along the road I was surprised at her agitation;

and she kept repeating the words of the letter : ‘ Ill and *deserted*—ill and *deserted* ! If he has done that,—my God, if he should have done *that* ! But he could not be so base and wicked ! ’

“ When we arrived, we found our way to a mean lodging, and asked for him, as he had told us, by the name of Burgess. As we entered the room, the first object we saw was a sickly-looking little girl, of about five years old, playing about the floor. Then Mrs. Gay gave a cry. The doctor came in nearly at the same time, and told her that he had very little hope.

“ She went in and saw her son, and stayed nearly an hour. She told me scarcely anything, except she said that the little girl was the daughter of some unfortunate married lady whom this scapegrace had run off with. I said nothing ; but I was as shrewd and far-seeing as she was, and I constructed my own theory. That theory I long thought over afterwards ; and

a few inquiries made it complete and perfect. In fact, I rather resented that she did not put confidence in me.

“In a few days he died, and she was with him to the last. The very next morning I missed the little girl; and when I asked Laura Gay about it, she said that they had found out the relations, who had at last sent and agreed to take charge of her. They were not wealthy, and she, ‘as usual,’ she said, had been obliged to agree to make them some allowance. Again, I had my own theory and my own conclusion; and I had also made my own inquiries, and learned that ‘the married lady’ was a dancer, and that she had gone off not long before with a French officer.

“Thus we settled everything happily, and returned home; and that—that girl’s father”—Mrs. Bligh never could call her Diana—“became the heir of Gay Court. From that time everything prospered. Laura made a great match for him, getting

him sixty thousand pounds and some interest, cleared the estate, and, had she lived, would have recovered the old baronetcy—the darling object of all her hopes. These schemes became her very life itself; but I noticed a great change in her, as she grew every hour more stern, and iron-bound, and pitiless. Something like *me*, Robert, you will say; and indeed, she taught me much; and if I had not been with *her*, perhaps I had been a different character. I often asked her about that time, and the little girl; what had become of her: but Laura Gay always answered me with a contemptuous laugh. ‘The low impostors! I am only sorry I paid them any money. I suppose she is keeping a café, or dancing at a franc-a-night, like her wretched mother. Why do you want to know?’ I did not tell her why I wanted to know, because I had suspicions of my own. But when that girl was growing up, and Laura had died—just, too, as she was so near the baronetcy—my

ambitious schemes for you, dear Robert, were ripening, and I kept it by me as a useful weapon. What gift is there, after all, like that of discreet silence—of not speaking until the proper moment has arrived ? ”

“ And you knew all this, mother,” said he, with a shocked look, “ and said nothing ? Allowed this dreadful injustice to go on for years ? ”

“ Well, I repair it now,” said she calmly, “ late as it is. As you say, a frightful wrong. But the true heir is found at last, and shall be restored ; the false intruder, whose pride nothing but adversity can bring down, shall be cast out ; that cold, cruel girl shall descend to her proper station—to beggary and pauperism, and—serve her right.”

Robert started.

“ I do not believe this. This looks like some scheme that has been contrived.”

“ You are consistent indeed,” she said coldly, “ for a lawyer. But no matter.”

“I mean, mother, they have imposed on you, or your anger against her has helped to impose on you. Do not think I care for her; but it is for yourself—to save you from a remorse that will embitter one part of your life.”

“Most considerate!” said she, her face every moment darkening. “You may spare me that conventional advice; I have heard it before. But this all points to something; speak out, and let me understand you. Do you mean to say that you will oppose me in this business? is that your meaning?”

“Oppose you? no. But, as I said, we should inquire—see that there is no fraud. That is my duty. I must see to that, as I am bound—whatever you think. Why did you meddle with it! O mother! Diana was right, then, when she said that this blow came from us. And he—that Lugard—was only right too.”

Mrs. Bligh darted a look of scorn and anger at him.

“What do you mean by these words to me? I tell you I would *wish* her to know it came from us. I am proud of it; and shall take care the world knows it comes from us. There!”

“It shall not come from me, mother,” said Robert, in a low voice. “I could not lend myself to such a course. No, nor must you.”

Again her face contracted.

“Nor must I! What is this? Is this the news you have come over to tell your mother? What does it mean? Speak out, or—O, I see! you have paid this visit in *her* interest?”

“No,” he said; “but I confess I suspected this, and I have come to save you from a terrible infatuation of which you would repent all your life.”

“My *long* life!” she said bitterly; “and which you shall have the glory of shortening, you cruel, ungrateful son, you! for whom I have given my heart’s blood. But don’t dare to come in my way, or give me lectures; go back to your courts as you

came, and God forgive you your want of heart."

"I have much to be forgiven," he said. "But it is for your sake I speak in this way; not for myself, indeed. I know all you have done for me—how you have sacrificed your life for me; and as you have done this also in my interest, as you think it, surely I may ask you, in the name of Heaven and of all your love for me, to give it up."

"Go away, then; go back!" she said in a trembling voice, and pointing to the door with a long and trembling finger; "go back. At least leave my room; I do not want you here—I have my own purposes. Bless the Being that made you that you do not take something worse with you, that will cleave to you all the days of your life."

She drew herself up—tall, grim, an awful image of terror. Some such image came back to him from his old childish days, when she had so appeared to him; something of the old terror even came back to

him, and mechanically he put out his hands imploringly to deprecate her wrath. She drew back as if she had trodden on some reptile.

“It is too late; nothing you can do will atone for *this*. Take your part, and let me take mine; unless—unless you go on your knees there, and swear that you will go back to London at once, and not move a finger.”

“No. I could not,” said Robert.

“Why do you stay, then?” she said frantically. “Am I not to have the ordinary privilege of being alone when I wish it? Leave me! or must I ring?”

There was a hard steel edge in her voice that seemed to cut and gash as she spoke, a cold savage glare in her eye which seemed to pierce him. All his court readiness forsook him; he wished to speak, but could not. As he stood faltering, she said, “Then *I* must go, I see!” and she swept from the room.

He often recalled her last look of scorn and concentrated hatred, as it seemed to him ; but he thought her old affection would triumph, and that he had only to return in the morning and he would find the old affection and gentleness still at his service.

When he did come back, repentant certainly, he was told that she was gone away—whither they could not tell him. He came away sadly, yet still saying to himself, “I could not do otherwise ; and she will thank me afterwards, I know, for saving her from a great sense of remorse.”

On board the packet for England was the usual crowd of tourists and business-men. The day was fine. Robert Bligh walked about the deck scarcely noticing the strange faces. Someone attracted his attention by an obsequious bow. He recalled that face as a professional one, the face of one belonging to the “lower branch” of the profession. He recollected that the name was Page.

CHAPTER V.

MORTIFICATION.

LADY MARGARET BOWMAN had gone, as the *Morning Plush* had taken care to advise the public, to a watering-place on the Continent. This simple piece of information, which, curious to say, did not interest any of Lady Margaret's *friends*, but did a great many who had never seen her, and who followed the movements of august people with the greatest zest,—this news became, under the magic of *Plush* treatment, as impressive as a state-paper: “We regret to learn that, owing to the imperative advice of her family physician, Lady Margaret Bowman has been obliged to leave town, to repair to the waters of Badentaul. It is hoped that her ladyship will be restored to health and

strength by the sanitary agency of that celebrated curative medium. Miss Gay, of Gay Court, is sojourning at Folkestone." An extract also from the lively *Regent-street Chronicle* may be found interesting. That capital journal always had some sort of hot muffin ready every night, something fresh, good, and appetising. The other papers had to bake and re-bake. The evidence for the plaintiff, in the impending ejectment-case, had been printed for the convenience of counsel, and the omnipotent *Chronicle* had contrived to get hold of a copy. It gave a morsel or two.

"The elements are dramatic enough," said the *Chronicle*. "What could be more so than the story of the Sœur Madeleine, belonging to a convent of gray sisters, near Amiens? Her story was taken before a commission; Mr. Staveley, Q.C., and two of his brethren — finding themselves, we daresay for the first time, within the enclosure of a convent. We have no doubt

the learned gentlemen behaved with all the gravity becoming their profession. This lady, it seems, is nearly eighty, and tells us a little history that we would commend to Mr. Philip Wattson for the first act of his next French drama at the Adelphi. She remembers a winter evening, a vast number of years ago, and an English lady coming in a post-chaise, and speaking French not very intelligibly, or, as the sister says naively, *à l'Anglaise*. She brought a little girl, whom she wished the community to bring up, and if possible convert into a nun; and said that a small capital, representing some thirty pounds a year interest, was already in Mr. Marx's hands, a local Amiens banker. She would return every year to see her charge. It was of course in accordance with the canons of dramatic propriety that the mysterious English lady never should return. The local banker, however, was a very satisfactory substitute. All this we

commend to Mr. Philip Wattson aforesaid as a tolerable Prologue—as it is the fashion to style a first act—for his ‘Lost Child,’ or whatever else he may choose to call his piece.

“But now steps in another lady, whose name for the present we shall do no more than indicate obscurely, after the fashion of our contemporaries, describing her as one intimately connected with a certain rising barrister of the outer bar, who lately unseated on petition a gallant officer who represented the little borough of C—. This lady has a foreign story to tell also, but which we must hold over for the present.”

That story was held over altogether, for the solicitor for the plaintiff, in the twinkling of an eye, made an application for an injunction to restrain further publication, and succeeded, and, to use his own expression, “salted” the lively journal in costs.

Still, as the depositions were so voluminous, Mr. Page found his account in

applications for time, motions, and so forth. Parties in these great suits are like the old line-of-battle ships, which have to be slowly towed into their place before action begins—a long business of warping, hauling, and what not. It would take many months before all was ready for the first gun.

Diana had not forgotten the hint of her kind friend Sir John. As soon as was practicable, she got a little sketch of her case and of its strong points from her solicitor, and tripped away quietly one morning to the great man's house. As the little face looked out from the cab, the mansion had itself an awful, attorney-general sort of air; and as the little figure got out timorously, Lady Jane herself happened to look from the window, and was not a little scornful to her friends on the score of this visit. No lady likes such appointments.

Sir John received Diana from behind a

barricade of papers, piled up like sandbags in a battery; laid aside the tremendous papers in the case of the seizure of the *William Simpson* by the Argentine Republic, and on which he was to give the Government an opinion, and welcomed "his little client" with great warmth and good-nature. He made her sit down beside him in a large "consulting-chair," as though he were a doctor, and a legal one. It was almost a picture to see this grave gentleman with Diana at his knee, her eyes on his as he read.

When he had done, he said anxiously, "You know, my dear child, things in our profession are very uncertain; and what with our pig-headed juries,—and lawyers also with pig-heads,—and our dull judges, and the mistakes of counsel, you see, everything is so uncertain. Therefore I am always for arranging or compromising. What do you think?"

"O, then you think that there is no

hope?" said Diana, piteously. "I see that is the meaning of all this."

"Not at all," said he, "but it is the uncertainty; and these sort of cases are more uncertain than any other. Send your solicitor to me; I have so much on my hands now in the House and elsewhere, that really—however, I shall see about *that*. Now, my dear, you must leave me; you can't imagine all the work on this poor head."

That evening she had a note from Mr. Page, saying he had seen the Attorney-General, and had given him a brief in the case. Diana knew what this meant, and wrote a deeply grateful letter to her kind good friend. But she was now to have other little trials and mortifications. As the time wore on, and wore on slowly, Diana was to learn a little about the true character of the world she had once thought so charming.

The young Lord Patmore would come at first pretty often, visits she was inclined to

set down to a generous sympathy and interest; but presently it became apparent that curiosity had a great deal to do with his attention. He put many questions, and would sit restlessly and pettishly as she answered him; and, not without skill, even cross-examined the unconscious little lady on the prospects of the case. She, with a sort of *épanchement* quite natural to her, told him the whole truth, rather over-colouring it in her wish for generous comfort.

“Indeed, I am sure we can only expect the worst; and indeed I wish it was all over, and the suspense ended. It is making me wretched.”

“But, good gracious,” said Lord Patmore, fretfully, “have you got no one to tell you anything—none of those lawyer fellows? that man that used to be with you—what’s his name—Bligh?”

“I would not ask him!” said Diana, drawing herself up and overstating an imaginary slight with scorn. “He is my

enemy. But they have taken the opinion of one of the best counsel,—and I don't understand things well,—but he seems to be very doubtful.”

“Seems to be very doubtful?” said he, starting up. “God bless us! I thought it was all plain sailing—an imposture, and all that?”

“I wish it were,” said Diana, sadly; “or if it be not, why should I wish to keep the rightful people out of their own? But it is very hard on me, brought up to all this, and who have not learned to do anything for myself.”

The young lord expressed no sympathy, but kept drumming with his foot on the ground.

“I'm sure,” he said, “it's most unpleasant and painful; and really I don't know what to say. Everybody is talking of it, and asking *me*. I am sure I don't know what I can tell them.”

“It is very dismal,” said Diana, still

reflectively; "but I have found everyone very kind; much more than I expected. I can never say that the world is hollow again."

"O, that's all very well," he said impatiently, "in the novels and that sort of place; but romance is one thing. I wasn't brought up to romance. My guardians and all that will be savage. I never even dreamt of this, and nobody did; and I am sure it is very strange altogether."

Diana was now looking at him with wonder, and not a little scorn. Now at last she understood. She was getting rough lessons every hour, under these unmeaning phrases and this pettish circumlocution. She was not angry; but still she felt a pang, for she had thought that this foolish butterfly, with all his folly and nonsense, was redeemed by his attachment to her. Indeed, this was the redeeming point of all the hollow world, their love and good-nature to *her*. Many others, in a position

like hers, cannot bring themselves to believe in anything but good of a world which is kind to them.

That night Lord Patmore received a letter from Diana, which cost her very little to write, though it seemed a tragic enough occasion; a person of the world, too, would have called it clever in its way.

“DEAR LORD PATMORE,”—it ran—“after you went away to-day I thought over very seriously what you had said, and also what your manner seemed to convey. I *do* feel that things have changed a good deal since you first paid me the compliment of giving me your regard. I am not exactly in the same position now, and we do not know what may happen. You will recollect that when you first spoke to me, and honoured me with so flattering a proposal, it was agreed that the matter should stand over till the end of the season. That has now come, and I think you will say it would be

for the best that we should remain as we were a year ago. I am sure you think with me. In any case it might hardly have suited; and it is much better to find this out before it be too late. I hope you will be very happy in whatever course of life you may adopt, and with whomsoever you choose; and believe me

“Your well-wisher, &c., DIANA GAY.”

The young lord read this document with infinite relief.

“She is so noble!” he said to his friend; “it all came from herself. Nothing could be more handsome. She has the head of a man, and sees the whole situation. Such delicacy! she saw that it could not be. I declare solemnly there isn’t a girl in town I would prefer to her—that is, if it was open to me to do it. I wish to Heaven it was, and that there was no such thing as money—or I mean that there was money enough for everyone.”

However, he was much relieved, though presently the reaction came, and he began to think that after all she might win the suit. And then Diana herself, after the first little shock, was as pleased; for the end of the season, when she was to give her decision, or rather announce her acceptance, was always before her, like some heavy trial. Now she was free; yet still she was mortified.

“I thought he liked me,” she said bitterly. “I suppose this is the whole secret of all their devotion; I thought they were coming so much after me, for myself alone.” A rueful discovery which so many have made long before Diana’s time.

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW LIFE.

WHEN Diana now thought of her old friend Robert Bligh, it was with a sense of regret and indignation. How could he be so unkind, so cruel and unworthy? As Richard said, who was never weary of inveighing against him with a savage and bitter earnestness, "it was mean and petty; it was like the spite of a school-girl. My dear Diana, that fellow hates you nearly as much as he hates me; and depend on it, this is but the beginning of his enmity."

She had, however, one friend left, who was in distress like herself; who had been cruelly persecuted by fortune, but who

through all had never changed to her, and who had now come forward so nobly to offer her an asylum.

When Diana's old friend, Kitty Crowder, now Mrs. Richard Lugard, was told of the new arrangement, she did not receive the news with any great enthusiasm. Her husband announced it with triumph.

"Kitty," said her husband scornfully, "is getting as insensible as some of those sea-plants. She will be a jelly-fish by-and-by. She cares for nothing,—is dead to the world, and all that; so you mustn't mind her. It's only her manner to me and to everyone."

Kitty laughed a little harshly.

"But what is *your* manner to me? Something between yours to your horse and to your man-servant."

"Polite always!" cried Mr. Lugard; "even elegantly so."

"That is my way," replied Mrs. Lugard very promptly, and left the room.

Diana looked after her wondering.

“There, you see what you have to expect,” said Richard.

The Lugards' house was handsome and well furnished, though not very large, and situated in the best quarter. Richard, with something of his old elation restored, went about busily, making many extra little purchases and decorations to set it off for their guest. He had put out of sight his recent mortification with the bit of comfort, “Never mind; there will be a dissolution one of these days; and if I sell the coat off my back, I'll fight him to the last.”

He was never weary of descanting to Diana on the way he had been treated, and the march that fellow had stolen upon him. But, as he said, all in good time. His friends meantime wondered how “poor Dick” contrived to keep his head above water, or keep the Jews off. Some mys-

terious arrangement had been made, and he had *not* been obliged to sell his commission, which many an experienced seer had prophesied he must have been obliged to do. But there were rumours also that the regiment was going to India sooner than had been expected,—a piece of news which Lugard often dwelt on bitterly and contemptuously to Diana, as he walked up and down his drawing-room.

“Going to India!” he said; “this is the fine way in which they manage things in this country of ours. A man with anything like genius or ordinary ability might as well go to the west coast of Africa; I see no difference. It’s scandalous to be treating English soldiers, and gentlemen of birth too, in such a way; sending a man to certain death and ill-health and misery. *I’ll* not go if they do. They talk of fighting Beloochees and Sikhs; I should hope we were born for better things than *that*.”

Diana’s old friend Kitty received the

new guest with that strange manner which now seemed habitual—a passive indifference to all that was going on round her. It not a little disturbed and embarrassed Diana, who said, in her own affectionate way, “I know, dearest Kitty, this is fretting you, and I begin to be afraid——”

Kitty interrupted her impatiently.

“Afraid of what? Of *me*? because I am not enthusiastic and full of rapture because you have come here? I tell you I am not, because I have lost all taste for everything, and care for nothing now. I have forgotten to be excited about anything.”

“But if I thought——” said Diana, who always had a sore difficulty in devising what she had to say that should be fitting and appropriate,—a lamentable deficiency, she thought, but common to many more with her. After a pause she said, not a little hurt, “O, I am afraid, Kitty, that I should not have—I see you do not wish it.”

Kitty rose impatiently.

“Why do you worry me?” she said; “you don’t know what I suffer, and I am not accountable for what I say. Go, then, if you will; and what a splendid scene we shall have here afterwards!” And Mrs. Lugard laughed to herself very scornfully. “I have got very brusque and altered, Diana, my old friend, and have to bear, O so much! you will see presently how much.”

To Diana, thinking over these curious speeches, the truth at last presented itself.

“Poor, poor Kitty!” she thought. “Now I see what she means. I *knew* they never would understand each other; but that cannot be helped now. I am *sure* I could manage it,—at least, I will try.”

What “she *saw* now” was a splendid task set before her, as though she was called to a missionary work—to make these two old friends, whom she liked, understand

each other *through her* ! She would be the new link. Kitty, she saw, worshipped him ; and Kitty did not know how to take his bold and too impetuous and impatient character, which required some skill. As Miss Gay thought of this very often, and sometimes before her glass, the pretty face she saw gazing seemed to say, “ Ah, little wayward rogue ! you have a foolish, irresistible way with you, which gets for you anything you wish, or lay yourself out for.”

Of course she owned her defects ; she was not as wise as those clever, long-headed women “ who knew the world,”—as that poor dear Lady Margaret, about whom Dr. Spindler, of the German Bath, used to write to her in such awfully unintelligible English. But she had no humiliation in this deficiency ; and, like most beauties, thought the treasure these possessed far brighter and more valuable than those prosy commodities which are so much

vaunted. But from Dr. Spindler, that courtier physician of the watering-places, far off as he was, our Diana was to learn one of those rough lessons about that new science of "knowledge of the world;" and it is certainly a little hard that to such tender scholars the instruction seems always to be conveyed in the most cruel fashion. But it is the penalty of late education.

This foreign practitioner had soon found out that "miladi" had a young and peerless ward, entitled in her own right to vast estates and influence. Her coming would of course presently be looked for; and with every post he sent away a most solicitous bulletin of miladi's health. One morning, however, Sir Joseph Masham, whose liver he was trying to get into something like order, had received his *Regent Street Chronicle*, and read him aloud the extract that has been already shown to the reader. Sir Joseph, whose liver had been trouble-

some, was in ill-humour that morning, and added his own private convictions on Diana's affairs, which were coloured by his irritation.

“Don't tell me; I know the place well—every acre of it. The thing has been brewing this long time, and I suppose that Gay did his best to stop their mouths during his lifetime. A foolish girl, with no wit in her head; and will be left there a perfect pauper. All must go or nothing.”

On this intelligence the German physician, in a very ill humour, at once ceased his correspondence, and even thought he had a claim for compensation for the way he had been taken in. Diana was deeply hurt. In her new life there was not much to cheer her.

Mrs. Lugard was in bad health, “always suffering,” as her husband said, impatiently.

“No one could make out what was the matter with her. Can't you say what doctor you would wish to see?—two, three,

four, if you like. For God's sake do as other people do, and have done with this martyr-business."

"I want no doctor," said Mrs. Lugard, coldly; "I never said I did."

These are merely the words of the scene; but spectators who have unhappily to sit in the stalls, and talk and look on, and see the faces, the action, and the byplay that accompany them, could supply much more.

By this time, however, what had been such a shock had begun to fade in the distance. The coming trial, like all such great ventures, was to take a long time before getting fairly afloat on legal waters. There were so many applications "in chambers" and elsewhere; so much swearing of affidavits, with fresh applications, also "in chambers," for additional time to reply to them,—a foreign witness or two to be examined, for which purpose a commission had "to be sped,"—that at last it seemed to be some distant cloud,

which might after all break and pass away with a change of wind. Diana herself began to think it might never come round, and gradually recovered her old enjoyment in the world before her. But all the while it was making slow and certain progress; the case was getting into shape, and, alas, already the beginning, like a small snow-ball, was being rolled on laboriously by the joint efforts of the attorneys on both sides; and when it presently got to the edge of the hill, would go bounding along of its own momentum. The "speeding" of the commission alone involved an agreeable tourist party, consisting of Mr. Staveley the barrister, a junior counsel from each side, a clerk from ditto, a shorthand-writer, and a sworn interpreter. The party travelled leisurely, received a handsome sum for expenses, and so many guineas a-day each.

From this delay, the public began to rally about the young heiress. They seemed to have been a little hasty. The "mammias"

and young men, not too nicely logical in their distinctions, assumed that "it had gone off," and began to embrace—that is the mammas—and cluster round Diana. Here was another worldly lesson. Even Lord Patmore, who, to do him all justice, had failed from a sense of what he thought was due to his position and high prospects, and had long since sorely repented, came in sackcloth to Diana. It was at a party, the usual scene for most dramatic incidents in Diana's life. Her two friends were beside her. But *that* was too much, thought Diana; quite too much.

When his lordship began with some apologies for not having called, adding he hoped she would be at home now, and he had had such a time of it, "and all that," Diana found her face colouring. She drew herself up.

"You need not say anything, Lord Patmore," she said; "but I think you very

unkind ; and I cannot tell you how much I suffered. It was cruel, O so cruel ! ”

The young lord glowed and coloured, and could only falter, “ O, I vow, Miss Gay,—that is, I couldn’t help it at the time,—you know, when I heard all that—”

“ And if you had only waited ! ” went on Diana ; “ you knew me so little. But you would not have suffered. I knew our relations were altered. But you must not think I am angry now ; and I shall never think of it any more.”

Diana swept away with not a little pride, and some trembling in her voice.

The culprit was confounded ; for he was prepared to condone the past graciously, leaving the future, as it were, open for him. Some of his friends caught a word or two ; others at a distance saw Diana’s face and bearing, and could decipher all very satisfactorily. So everything being put together, it was understood that “ that donkey Pat-

more had been trying to patch the thing up and had been gloriously snubbed."

It is surprising how accurate in the main is that shifting, hasty, indifferent, and even ignorant, body the public. Among some of the young men opinions were expressed a little strongly as to "Patmore's behaviour."

CHAPTER VII.

THE CLAIMANT.

It was one of those shining bright festival days which are so pleasant on the deck of a vessel, when it is known that three-fourths of those about us are all servants of pleasure, with faces full of smiles and of hope. Only a few scattered ones belong to the ranks of business, and have anxious or overcast looks. The blue sea is so smooth, the vessel glides on so gently, the air is so soft, the sky so bright, that steam-voyaging loses all its horrors. Pretty faces covered with smiles, full of spirits, are in rows, as if enjoying the sun in a garden. Who would think that all this should ever change to horrible scenes—Pandemonium rather—the

roar of wind and waves, the sweeping deluge, the swoop down into the abyss, the quivering, the creaking, the groans and cries of agony below ?

Robert was not one of these pleasure-seekers ; he was listless and troubled, and sat himself down in a quiet corner, trying to read. The packet was very crowded, and there were not seats for all the passengers. Looking up, he noticed an interesting young girl who seemed to look wistfully for some place to sit down, and he at once offered her his seat. This little civility was received gratefully. She asked him some question about a London street, and then, with a kind of foreign accent, said she had never been in England before. Bligh told what she wished to know, looked after her luggage, &c., and received her warm thanks.

Bligh had noticed on the deck of the vessel a tall gentleman, with very black locks, and very black moustache, curly hair, and a large hat with a broad timeworn

brim. This person walked up and down the deck very much as if he was in the Burlington Arcade, and, as he passed, stared coolly at each one of the lady-passengers. There was a steadiness in this proceeding that made some not a little curious; and many mammas made secret resolutions that when they came to the train they would avoid the carriage which this “odious man” would choose. Bligh had noticed him—he is a not uncommon character on our great lines—and had returned his glances with contempt and hostility; a small indemnity. Such are indeed the vermin of our public society. When, too, Bligh found himself seated beside the young girl, he noticed the peculiar look of this oily dandy, whose complacent confidence in his own attractions would have been amusing had they not been so odious. It seemed to Bligh that this stranger looked on him with resentment as an intruder. The young girl told Bligh that this man had been very forward in what he

called "attentions," but which were indeed familiarities, in the French railway-carriage.

"But I have no one with me; and we, who are forced to travel by ourselves, are helpless."

"Well, in this voyage at least," said Bligh promptly, "I hope I may be found of some use."

At the station the "odious man," as might have been anticipated, came pushing and thrusting himself close on the young girl.

"My dear," he said, "I'll get your luggage for you. Leave it all to me."

She only shrank away from him. Bligh meantime had taken the guard aside.

"Put this lady," he said, "into a carriage that is pretty full; and don't let that gentleman in. You see the class of man he is."

The guard nodded.

"I understand, sir. I saw him a minute ago. We have plenty of his sort."

The young girl was put in as directed. Bligh also found a place in the same carriage, and the door was promptly locked.

The "cad, vermin, or reptile," came up in a moment, and was dragging at the handle.

"Here, you!" he cried, "open this, d'ye hear?"

"Can't go in there, sir," said the guard; "this way, please."

"I wish to go in here; you open the door at once."

"Can't do so—plenty of room down hear."

The "cad" saw Bligh's face looking out and smiling. He saw, too, the other face looking at him, and enjoying his discomfiture. The guard was called away. One of the party in the carriage had to get out, having forgotten something, and the oiled and oily gentleman came crushing in with his bags, and sat down opposite Bligh, and beside the young girl.

"No one," he said, looking insolently at

Bligh, "has a right—guard or *any one* else—to keep me out of a public carriage where there is a seat."

Bligh was not a man to be baffled even in a trifle. He rose up quietly, and left the carriage. In his absence the oiled gentleman "addressed the carriage," but no person in particular.

"We are coming to fine times in this free country; that gent did well to retire, I can tell you."

But Bligh's face was at the door again.

"Will you come down?" he said. "There is a *coupé* in front, with some ladies."

And with a light step the young girl had tripped down.

"You have forgotten your things, sir," called out one of the passengers to him.

"O, *I* am coming back, thank you," he said; "and that is my place."

The young lady was put into the *coupé*, and Bligh returned to his carriage, and sat down quietly in front of the black-haired

and oily gentleman, who glared at him and muttered, but who had due awe of public opinion expressed in the looks of the other passengers. Nowhere does that public opinion exert such pressure as in that strict space; any one who would transgress it is at its mercy.

When the journey was over, the young girl found that Robert had actually paid for this *coupé* himself, to secure her from inconvenience. To her girlish mind it seemed quite a chivalrous deliverance, and that she never could forget it.

When he returned to London and found himself again in his chambers the usual legal arrears were waiting. The briefs sent, in their way the neatest specimen of workmanship known, were lying on his table, like little packages of pure glazed snowy Belfast linens. He looked at them all in succession,—a mere mechanical operation,—but with more curiosity at a vast plethoric bundle, so swelled as to be with difficulty

confined within reasonable girth. To his astonishment he read on it, "*GAY v. GAY*. Ejectment on the Title : Case for the Plaintiffs. Fee, 50 guineas. The Solicitor-General ; Mr. Hawker, Q.C. ; with you." The names of the solicitors were very familiar to him ; a most respectable house, and firm patrons of his. He knew, therefore, it could be no "speculative" case, and that there were "merits." "That poor child," he thought, "it looks very dangerous. She will lose all." Indeed, events seemed to be growing too strong for her. He sent back his brief with a note, saying there were family reasons why he could not act in the business ; and then, his mind being in legal matters quite a mechanical engine, he was soon forgetful of all that had happened, and busily absorbed in his points, as though he had just come home from Court.

In a few days he called at the solicitors', and sent in word that he wished to speak to one of them. Mr. Griffiths came out

very speedily, being, indeed, busily at work in his office on this very case. Bligh asked him all about it, and began by telling him it was out of the question for him to accept a brief in it. He explained that he always acted for the family, and “advised” on a good deal of their law business. The solicitor quite understood, and took up his little tale.

“In fact,” said Bligh, “I should wish to accommodate the matter in some way, if I could. She is a young girl with few friends, and quite helpless; and if the case is at all doubtful, and there were grounds for compromising—”

The solicitor shook his head. “It’s all plain sailing; we have everything in black and white. Besides, the people themselves will go through with it. The aunt or guardian is a very determined scheming Frenchwoman. But the young plaintiff seems nice enough. They are the greatest plagues and interrupters of business in the

world, fussing here every day, merely to know this and that and t'other."

A clerk here came and said, "Madam Saxe, sir."

"There," said the solicitor; "I knew they were coming. Show them in here."

Bligh rose to go away.

"You may as well stay a moment and see what they are like; and I have another reason, which you will know the moment they come in," said the solicitor; and not being able to resist his curiosity, Bligh took up his hat and remained, a little irresolutely.

A lady with a sharp nose and a very heightened colour, and in her dress of the more vulgar French type, came in, with a young girl following. He recalled his fellow traveller at once. As Bligh looked at her he saw, with something like a thrill, that, though taller, she had a curious, though rather *secret* likeness, to Diana, more in her air and bearing

than in features. He noted the sly sort of coquetry with which she glanced at the strange gentleman present, and which he thought was "poor Diana all over."

The bold French lady could speak English tolerably, and established herself comfortably on a chair, as for a long *séance*. She seemed to challenge Bligh haughtily; and in truth the solicitor was not a little in awe of her. Bligh recollected her manner as being akin to the "business women" of Paris, all smiles and sweetness, save when there is a dispute about half a franc, when sharp and venomous teeth are shown, and claws shoot out at the end of the fingers, and a hissing spitting cat has taken the place of the charming lady.

"This," said the solicitor, "was one of our counsel, the Mr. Bligh I was speaking to you about. Unhappily, he is obliged to return the brief."

Both ladies started and looked at Bligh, the elder one with hostility.

“And why?” she said suddenly. “There is no discredit, I hope, in our cause.”

“O dear, no,” said Bligh coldly; “there were private reasons.”

“He is a friend of the defendant’s. It is the etiquette in this country.”

“In ours too,” said Madame Saxe rudely. “But you have seen our papers; they have been in your possession.”

Bligh coloured.

“They lay on my table for a day or two; but I have not seen a line beyond the address.”

“O, aunt,” said the young girl, now speaking for the first time, “we should not think that. I do not suspect it; and I am the person chiefly interested.”

The solicitor smiled, and, taking up the brief said, “As madame wishes for proof, here it is. This is my own knot; I know it as well as my own handwriting.”

More graciously, then, Madame Saxe made a sort of *amende*; then pulled a

paper out of her pocket, and said in a low voice, "I only got this to-day. I read it carefully."

They went over into the window; and Bligh, again about to go away, said with a smile to Eugenie—

"I thank you for acquitting me; though, indeed, we barristers are accustomed to charge each other with all sorts of sins and crimes; that is, *in* court. I am sorry your first experience of our country should be experience of law."

Eugenie sighed. She was really no more than eighteen; and that sigh recalled yet more again.

"I do not wish it. I was very happy in my convent. But it is hard to refuse riches; and they tell me it is charming to be rich."

Bligh could not resist saying, in a low voice, "But are you so sure of being rich? Do you know the terrible uncertainty of the law, and that it is not right that always

wins? Cases like yours are full of dangers and difficulties. I have no right to say this, for I am interested for one you consider your enemy, or whom you wish to dispossess."

"Indeed, no; a thousand times no. I would not injure her for the world. They tell me she is a charming, innocent girl; but I have my rights. It is she who is injuring *me*. Do you like her; *is* she so charming?"

Bligh for a moment became a little enthusiastic.

"Not a word too much could be said for her. She is full of grace and beauty, and I tremble when I think what is impending over her. If you only knew how she has been brought up—kept from any stroke of pain or sorrow save *one*—from every breath that could cause annoyance—surrounded with luxury, her own will her only law,—you could imagine what a terrible blow this will be for her."

“But,” said the young girl, “it will not be so bad as that for her. We shall let her have something. We French are not quite so cruel as you seem to think. We shall leave her something—enough to live on.”

Bligh shook his head.

“Enough to live on in your sense would be beggary for her; enough to live on in her sense would mean the fortune she has now. She is very sensitive; a mere flower, that would wither —”

The young girl coloured.

“How romantic!” she said. “Is she so great a friend of yours? How long have you known her?”

“Since I was a boy,” said he.

“And I suppose she likes you. She ought certainly; for you are a very warm ally. You will of course be her counsel?”

“No,” he said, embarrassed; “there are reasons against that, especially after what has occurred to-day.”

“How curious all this is!” said Eugenie,

reflecting; "and what is this charming enemy of mine like?"

Bligh was about to say that Diana resembled her so strikingly when she interrupted him.

"But I am quite friendless here. I have no one to look to or to turn to, and no one that is kind to me for myself. I wish they had left me to my dear convent; and yet I could not go back now, for this has all unsettled me. Who can refuse to be rich when they tell you it is certain?"

"But who tells you?" said Bligh gently. "As I told you, there is nothing certain in law. How can that French lady know—"

"It is not she. There is another; that strange, fierce lady who knows all and who moves all, and whom I fear so, and whom even Madame Saxe dreads. You do not know what manner of woman she is, and what she can do."

"Yes," said Bligh, "I do know her. You mean Mrs. Bligh—my mother."

“Your mother!” said the girl, rising up suddenly; “Mrs. Bligh your mother!”

There was a pause. Robert Bligh rose also.

“Now you will understand,” he said. “There are others who have their troubles as well as you. She has her own views in this. She is on your side in this business; I cannot be. Neither can I be your friend, nor sympathize with you, which I would wish to be, as I would for any stranger. So good-bye. You cannot ask me to wish you success, even though my mother is on your side.”

As he walked away he thought a great deal of this incident, taking a true barrister’s view of it.

“If I had been inclined or so unprincipled as to encourage her,” he said to himself, “she would have told me anything I wanted to know.” But the strange air and likeness that was about her seemed fatal. “Poor, poor Diana!” he thought, as he sat

down to his table and listlessly opened out his briefs, "it is all over for her."

And though those heavy arrears, though the snowy bales of linen were waiting their turns, and time was very precious, it was long before he could concentrate his attention. At times he would start up and walk; but at last set himself desperately to work with this speech, "There could be no harm in *that*. Yes; she might be brought to compromise it."

There are plenty of jeremiads over the hard fate of "the man in full business," and who has to combine law and Parliament; yet there must be an excitement that redeems all from sheer drudgery—the "showy" cases, the constant hurry and "panting and toiling" to keep up with time, the change of scene from the House to Court. The barrister who is not absolutely killing himself, not ghastly pale or unwholesome yellow, may well look back with pleasure to those stirring days.

Mr. Bligh, now pursued and wanted by every one,—videttes of clerks waiting for him at turns and corners, and very often pounced upon with a mysterious air by the “whip” and manager,—was now hopelessly committed to this absorbing life, and had to go round and round in the ring without being allowed to stop. He had long fought off this state of things; but events had proved too much for him. He saw he must be left behind altogether, or fly round headlong like the rest.

He was one day sitting in the library of the House of Commons, with his head rather weary, having snatched a few moments to consult some books of international law for a great parliamentary question now drawing on, and on which he had a dreamy notion of speaking, when a letter was brought to him. He laid down the Kent’s “Commentaries,” and read the following:—

“DEAR SIR,—Since the evening I saw you I have been thinking over what you said. I begin to feel more and more every hour how miserable it is being dragged into this business. There seems to be no likelihood of its ending or of its beginning, and they tell me too much has been ventured for me now to withdraw; but your words about the uncertainty of law seem to ring in my ears. Would I had never left my own dear country! I know not what to do. But if you would not think it a liberty in me, or asking too much, it would make me very happy if I could see you, and consult you again as to what I am to do; still more if you would change your resolution about not appearing in my case. At all events, dear sir, would you let me see you and consult; for I have no one to consult, and I would almost promise to be guided by you. I remain yours, &c.

“EUGENIE GAY.”

Bligh threw this down on the table, then tore it up leisurely in many small pieces, then wrote an answer. It covered but a page, and ran,—

“MADAM,—I regret it would be quite impossible for me to change my mind. I still think it would be advantageous for every suitor to settle his case, in preference to expensive and uncertain litigation; but I could not take upon myself to advise you in this instance. Indeed, you must excuse me if I tell you that my relation to all these matters is very delicate indeed. For the future, therefore, I must decline to interfere.

I am yours,

“ROBERT BLIGH.”

He was not a little unsettled by this communication, for it now seemed as if these were very much the tactics of an adventuress.

“She has heard from the solicitor about me,” he thought, “and would like to pick up all she could.” He had seen specimens enough of that artful behaviour in the witness-box.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHISPERS AND SCANDALS.

DIANA had her horses as usual, and the great argosy, which, after an interval, she had resumed. With Mr. Lugard she used to be seen on the great Prado in the Park, that gentleman appearing splendid and *rayonnant* in this new part of his, having become more gracious and soft of late; as was indeed remarked by his club-acquaintances, with a conscious and “knowing” air, which, in the language of men too intimate and too languid to spend words, signified quite a whole conversation. Among these familiars a shrug stood for an anecdote; and thus was saved much precious time. It was indeed some-

thing to see Diana fresh and glittering as though she had been taken out of a jewel-case; or upon her "satin-coated" steed (as a "Lounger in Rotten Row" once wrote down to the *Mercury*), whose coat, glistening with a golden-brown, threw out the small delicate figure with surprising effect. With them used to ride a fashionable warder—Mrs. Wycherly, wife of Captain Wycherly—a pleasant, agreeable lady, whom Diana regarded with wonder and secret admiration, and who carried on the profession of the handsome married lady—chartered free-lance—than which none is more inviting, for the time. Lugard, in his way, represented the other branch of the profession. Thus the trio rode along; now charging at full speed, their horses scattering the mould; now drawn up in the great group opposite the gates, as if waiting to receive cavalry. Anon Colonel Crozier or Lord Symperly would join, and the little party would

break into twos, his lordship and Mrs. Wycherly in front, Captain Lugard and Miss Gay behind. Then Mr. Lugard would say, "Let them go on in front. I suppose that Symperly has his usual wallet of folly. *Do go on. Teach me*, as you were doing when he came up."

Teach Captain Lugard! We should like to have seen any other gentleman or lady make *that* speech! "Teach me!" he would have answered, his lips curling, "what, pray? What is this wonderful knowledge you are in possession of? Who taught *you*, pray? If it is not too curious a question, *have* you been taught at all? You had better be sure of that first," &c. Yet Diana was teaching this rather intractable scholar. For the first time in her life she had been consulted, asked for advice, and for some of her rather slender worldly knowledge. "I know nothing," Mr. Lugard would say gloomily, "I, that have been about and

mixed with every one. I am shipwrecked ; I know not how it will end. And yet I wish to do right. You have seen for yourself—all that I strive, all that I suffer, all that I am *obliged* to suffer. It may be my fault—most likely it is ; for I am not perfect,” added Mr. Lugard handsomely. “But I leave it to you ; you have now for some time seen what our household is, and what fatal discord reigns in it. As I say, it may be my fault ; but still, if I knew what to do, if some one—if you only would tell me or teach me !”

This was not the first time our Diana had been so invited. A flush of real pleasure overspread her innocent cheek, and a sensation, which she did not know to be born of vanity, rose in her. She was not the child, after all, that Lady Margaret always seemed to hint she was, or that she herself thought she was. She was not to lead that sort of purposeless life, which her

own conscience so often whispered to her was, besides profitless, devoted to toys and vanities, to the mere battledore-and-shuttlecock of life, the soap-bubble blowing, which she had always a suspicion she could not rise beyond. O, here was the opportunity! if she could only bring these two hapless souls to know and understand each other! But it is oftener an accident that determines a mind on a certain course than a mere studious and officious advice or remonstrance.

Wally Pepys had come up to her in his specially confidential way—kept for young ladies exclusively—and had said, “Ah! I see you have taken our friend in hand. I declare he is getting more human and less savage every hour. Will you put me down for the next vacancy?”

“But you are human, and not savage,” said Diana, smiling, “But indeed Captain Lugard is not savage; we were children together, and he is like a cousin.”

Mr. Lugard took great pleasure in this process of his own reformation, listening with great docility while our heroine advised and counselled; then taking up the theme himself, dwelling on the point—a little worn now—of his having been *manqué* from the beginning, of no one understanding him, of his life being one succession of crosses and misfortunes. “And,” added he one evening as they were alone in the drawing-room, “it is not so much my fault after all. I might have been now happy and prosperous, instead of having to look forward to years of misery from which there is no prospect of release.”

Diana really did not understand.

“But how?” she asked.

“What!” said he, turning on her with a half-wounded, half-indignant air, “you forget *that*? You don’t wish to mortify me, I suppose, by reminding me of that humiliating day when—”

“When,” said Diana, beginning to be

fluttered, and looking round uneasily—
“when my poor father was taken from me?”

“Yes,” he said; “I know that. But for a great deal of all this you are accountable, Diana. Surely you remember how we were children together, and how as a boy I was always taught and encouraged to look to *you* as the great object. Even your father—”

“Never, never!” said Diana, a little excited; “not by me. Such a thing, as I live, never entered my mind. I always liked you, Richard, but I could not be so cruel as to hold out hopes which could not be realized.”

His lips showed that he had a sarcasm ready. “What of Lord Patmore? You loved *him*, I suppose? O, now, pray be a little consistent.”

Diana was much confused by this thrust. “I had not my own free will. I was forced into it—”

“You! a free agent, able to do what you please! O, that *is* folly! But I may speak out now, Diana, as all that is past and done with. I tell you plainly, I *did* look forward to marrying you; and you know that, Diana. And if I had done so my life would have been different, and to me a blessing, inst—”

This language, which was indeed the truth, quite scared her.

“O, Richard, Richard, you must not talk of that; indeed you must not. And if I had thought for a moment—”

“I don’t *want* to talk of it,” said he, impatiently; “Heaven knows it is no pleasant subject for me. But we must look those things in the face; and you know, dear, it is the truth. I might have been a different man now, happy and prosperous and successful. But that can’t be helped. Only,” he added with some bitterness, “I see you have lost even your old kindness. I suppose now that I have failed, and that I am

no longer successful, I deserve contempt. You are quite right—it is only the way of the world.”

Much hurt by this cruel insinuation, and at the same time full of sympathy, our Diana quite forgot the little shock she had at first sustained when Lugard was dwelling on his old attachment, and at the end was only anxious to encourage and fortify him in the course from which he had now no retreat. When next they spoke, Lugard thanked her warmly, and said he felt much better and stronger; and Diana was full of joy, and really began to think her profession and special “call” in life was this little art of making ill-suited married people live together pleasantly. “Such little ways as I have,” she thought to herself, “trifling as they are, and which seem to please people, it may be Heaven’s will I should turn to this use.” There was a strain of very ardent piety through her nature, and on Sundays she followed rather fiery ministers

of the Gospel, and trembled and grew tearful as they roared torments and tortures, and at less-troubled moments bent her eyes down over her book, and prayed with her whole little heart.

But while the Rev. William Monkiron, hottest of gossellers (it was strange that this delicate creature should be drawn by these strong and raging pious curries), made his chapel (Lady Dulcimer's chapel-of-ease) resound with wild cries against ungodliness and worldly pleasures, our Diana was not at all conscious that she was innocently sitting enrolled in the band whom Mr. Monkiron had sternly sentenced to be "cast out." Those ridings on the bright bay, with the gallant Lugard and the admired Mrs. Wycherly, repeated so often; those expeditions in the same unvarying company to opera and ball; the friendly and trusting encouragement of the young lady, began to attract the attention of the idle and the scandalous.

Lady Poldoodie said with a smile "that all parties had got rid of poor dear Lady Margaret most conveniently;" and the faithless Wally Pepys asked, "wasn't there a wife put by in some *maison de santé* quite as conveniently?" Some one to whom Lugard had been specially brusque, or even rude, threw another little rag in, as the *chiffonier's* basket passed to him. "Mrs. Monkton says she saw them both walking in Richmond Park *alone*." And what that lady had told was strictly true, "for once in her life," as Mr. Pepys would have said, but she could not have seen Mrs. Wycherly and another friend who were sitting on a bench not very far away. In this way the buzz began, which gradually swelled into a loud drone. Mr. Lugard soon heard it, and with the complacent vanity of his sex bent his ears to listen, and gave the foolish smile of disclaimer which means admission. Indeed, this season of his rather tumultuous life

was very pleasant to him to think on—a snatch of a dream, though any moment he would be awakened. But neither drone nor buzz ever reached those little pink, smart, delicate shells that were Diana's charming ears. Meaning looks, indeed, she might translate, if she would; but she was too unskilled in such matters.

Sometimes on the great thoroughfare and crowded highway of fashionable life she would meet Robert Bligh, now become the strange *rara avis*—a good-looking barrister in large practice in Parliament, yet not chained to his shelves like the books in the monks' libraries, but seen abroad at "the dance, the dinner, and the drum"—the burden of a pleasant song, which he himself wrote, "knocked off" one evening, and which the good-looking young composer, Arthur Western, had set to music; "words by Robert Bligh, Esq., M.P."

“ The dance, the dinner, and the drum—
Young and old we come—we come.
The drum, the dance, the dinner ;
Charming saint, more charming sinner.
The drum, the dinner, and the dance ;
Many a fair and many a lance.”

His progress was wonderful. “ Sure to be next Solicitor.” “ Wouldn’t take a judgeship,” “ On the high-road to the woolsack,” were the agreeable prophecies made about him ; though indeed there is no high-road to the woolsack, but rather a dark walk through a wood, or perhaps a jump across a crevasse with a successful landing on the other side. He had youth and good looks—the best ornaments and decorations in the world, and which, when combined with success, are irresistible. His table and chimneypiece were covered with cards and invitations, and made a curious mangle with briefs and parliamentary papers. Some friends and admirers wondered exceedingly that he had not yet spoken in the House ; but we, who by this time know

something of Mr. Robert Bligh and his disciplined nature, may readily guess that this was only the old caution—the making sure of the ground, and waiting till the proper opportunity arose. Many also noticed—for the movements of any rising man are watched with an almost flattering observance—that he was scarcely in good spirits. The same observers had “their eye on him” when he and Miss Gay met, and noticed her attempt at a haughty greeting, and his cold manner. And they also saw how her gaze followed him with a sort of wistful curiosity as he went away with the beautiful Miss Henniker on his arm—Lady Jane Williamson’s cousin, and most honourable daughter to Lord Mountermine. Indeed, Mr. Bligh was now constantly at Mr. Attorney-General’s, and Lady Jane—as the phrase runs—“could do nothing without him.” Was it at all surprising that the meddling *Cuckoo* should presently flap its wings, give one of its shrill screams, and announce to all Lon-

don on its front page, "We understand that a marriage has been arranged between the Honourable Emily Henniker and Mr. Robert Bligh, M.P. for Calthorpe" ? And though "there was not a particle of truth, my dear," in the whole business, the matter was, strange to say, left uncontradicted. For Mr. Bligh was none of those sensitive and rather mean souls who would be disturbed at such a public *affiche* ; nay, would rather feel it a high honour to have his name coupled with any lady's ; and, on the other hand, Miss Henniker and "her party," as the racing world would say, very fondly wished that the statement could be made true. It was Captain Lugard who brought in that last number of the *Cuckoo* and tossed it down triumphantly. "There," he said, "I knew he'd sell himself to the highest bidder. It's only what I expected."

Diana read. Her lips curled a little.

"And who is Miss Henniker ?"

“Don’t you see?” went on Lugard with great scorn; “a relation of the Williamsons, —Lady Jane, and all that. He wants to creep into something that way. Just the same as he ever was, even at school, when he was always toadying old Wheeler’s nephew, who was among the boys.”

Diana read it over very often.

“Is she pretty?” was another woman’s question.

“And that poor Buller whom he has treated so scandalously,” went on Lugard; “kept on and off for all these years. Isn’t that like him? He finds old Buller isn’t worth much in the political way, and he throws the poor girl off. But the Ministry is shaky enough, and I hope to Heaven he will be overreached.”

Thus was our second hero engaged, scarcely fancying that he was quite giving the *coup de grâce* to the demolition of the old image. Yet this gentleman knew very little of the

human heart, and of the female human heart especially. All this piqued and tantalized the young lady sorely, and fretted and vexed her; though, to say the truth, she did not believe a syllable of the story about Miss Henniker,—albeit certified in print, and by the *Cuckoo*. Much as she resented his “cruel and unkind” behaviour, she still had a secret instinct and certitude that the old silver chain was not broken, and that though she might cast away *her* end, he had not strength to do the same with his.

After Richard Lugard had gone out, she read this announcement very often. Then her eye wandered down listlessly over the other oracular notices, as to persons “accepting the Chiltern Hundreds,” and the rumour that Lord Bulstock was likely to be “the new Lord Cofferer.”

“Fancy,” said some of the cynics of the day, “*being* a Lord Cofferer at all; but what manner of man must that be whose

hopes and fears are agitated by the chance of being *likely* to be a Lord Cofferer ? ”

Her eye rested then on some paragraphs like this: “It is said that there is a rock ahead for the Ministry, of the danger of which the astute captain who commands is quite sensible; and that he has enrolled some amateur hands in the crew; not indeed ‘rated’ on the ship’s books, but who will be taken in according to the work they do. One of these ‘dark’ auxiliaries is said to be the new member for Calthorpe, who brings a mysterious reputation, which defies time, place, or man’s recollection. It is said he has been retained to do this duty on some evening in the following week, when Mr. Masham brings on his motion.”

Diana almost started as she read. The dull Lugard was only building up, instead of destroying. Her exclamation almost was her old one: “O, how wonderful he is! how clever! Indeed he is getting success.” And she sat there for a long time, dreaming

over these great prospects, and determined to make out what was the meaning of these political riddles. Not so much pity is akin to love : it is more so to contempt. Admiration or public success is the true quickener.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PETRUCCI AFFAIR.

It came to pass about this time that news reached England, among other foreign items, that a certain half-Englishman and half-Italian called Petrucci, who was a kind of mongrel-agent out in Chili, had been seized by that Government and put in prison for smuggling. This piece of news did not affect the public mind, and was read at many a breakfast-table half-mechanically, —taking up a space no more than a single line. But in a week or so one of the light horse of Parliament—the stray, disengaged Cossacks, who scour about on little active animals of motions and “questions” —marked this speck warily in the horizon,

and pricked down upon it. Mr. Derby Blagden was the lucky rider who pounced on the prey first, and he “put a question to the noble lord at the head of the Government”—the tight, wiry, compact, elderly English country gentleman who then administered affairs with such success, in the very perfection of *laissez faire*. There were some patriots of the Roman sort who objected to this principle; and who, as one of them said, did not wish the politics of the country to be dealt with in the fashion the architect of their palace had treated the interior Gothic pillars and stonework—namely, by covering up the roughness and decay with a smooth and even coat of “nice” buff paint. Others were discontented at this successful “jockeyship,” as they called it; others, again, were envious; more were greedy. The old politician, however, held his way; directing the country very much as he rode his cob down to the House—in a pleasant half-amble, half-walk. But when

Blagden put his question, and received a jocular — perhaps saucy — answer, which caused a general laugh, some of the discontented began to “take the thing up;” the hostile newspapers saw that there was something in it, and as the thing grew and began to be discussed, and it was asserted “that the honour of the country” had been touched, matters began to look different. Soon the heading was changed to “The Petrucci Outrage;” and it was fairly started as a great question when it became known that Mr. Masham, a usual supporter of the Government, had given notice of a motion on the subject. This was indeed serious; for it was before the era when the device of mere privates and sergeants in the regiment denouncing their colonel and officers was found to be a piquant way of acquiring reputation.

Every one began to talk of the matter, in clubs and coteries; the old Minister put on his jauntiest manner, but was disquieted;

laissez faire, his Mephistopheles, seemed to have deserted him; and people, by talking so much of the danger, made it appear more serious than it really was. It grew and grew; another great and independent member put an amendment on the paper; there was a mustering and drilling, and it had become a regular "party" question. That was the recall; the whips were already out, the patrols scouring the alleys and political public-houses for their stray men.

What interest could this great question have for Diana, with that greater division which affected her case now impending? She lived in a sort of trepidation and excitement as the day drew near. It was only three weeks away now. Very often she used to repair to her friend Sir John, the Attorney-General, who gave her such snatches of comfort as he could.

"My poor child, I can tell you nothing; I wish I could. You must train yourself to bear whatever may come—defeat or, as I

trust it will be, success. You see, if they make out their case as it stands—if they prove it—why, I am afraid. But, then, will a jury believe them? will they believe that Mrs. Bligh, that half-mad, half-wicked woman, whom I shall have the pleasure of cross-examining? And, my dear child, if we don't make an *exposé* of her let us be defeated on this motion that is coming on. Now, you must run away. I have to defend Ministers on the law of the business; get up the Chili view, and Kent and Story and Vattel, and all those rascals whom your little head has nothing to do with. It will be warm work. There is a clever fellow to follow me, though; you remember Bligh—my cross-examinee's son?"

"What, he is to speak!" said Diana with interest. "But he is no friend of mine; he was once."

"Why, you don't suppose he has anything to do with that? Lord bless you, he has too much to do. That's one of that Page's

stories, who is a little too much of the detective for me. Mind, I prophesy he'll make a name with this speech."

"But others say it," said Diana. "O, he has been so unkind and cruel, so treacherous, they tell me."

"Now, I must turn you out," said Sir John a little abruptly; "you'll come to me again, and we'll talk of this."

Diana went away in her cab with her maid. She liked these expeditions—the unofficial "explorings" in streets and shops. But she thought as she went along of what Sir John had said, and for the first time it did occur to her that Mr. Page was scarcely of the proper sort as a legal adviser. She thought again and again of Bligh's old devotion, proved in a hundred ways, and that, after all, the chief evidence against him of dislike to her was the angry jealousy of "poor Lugard." Under all this feeling (but she was not conscious of its presence)—was the sense of curiosity and admiration,

—admiration at his power and cleverness and steady progress; and it was scarcely surprising that “poor Lugard’s” purposeless life—a series of failures—should seem to her not a little contemptible. With all this came a curious and restless desire which attended her as she went about, to see something of this coming success. She would give anything to know, to look on at, his triumph; he was sure to be successful, as indeed she had a presentiment.

This idea took possession of her, and before the evening was over she had written one of her “nice little notes” to her good friend the Attorney-General.

“MY DEAR SIR JOHN,—I should so like to hear this wonderful debate that is coming on, and the great speeches that will be made. Could you get me into the ladies’ gallery? Would it be too much?

“DIANA GAY.”

“Curious girl,” thought Sir John. “She will find me very dry. Vattel will bore her.” Even her Majesty’s Attorney-General became stupid in the presence of his own complacency. He wrote back that he would manage it, and that Lady Williamson would call for her. Diana was delighted, as she always was at the success of any of her little schemes.

When she saw Lugard again he was eager with a new arrangement.

“I have got tickets for that concert you wished to go to,” he said. “I know you like music, and I moved heaven and earth to get them.”

Kitty was sitting in her favourite position, looking at the fire in a sort of half-reverie, and broke out harshly with “How many things have you moved heaven and earth for? Poor heaven and earth!—and for a concert-ticket!”

Lugard turned on her impatiently. “There is one thing,” he began; but

Diana's imploring look — she was always wretched when she saw these first guns fired — checked him.

“Go on,” said Mrs. Lugard, turning round full on him; “finish, pray. I suppose to get rid of me you would move heaven and earth?”

“No, no; indeed, Kitty, you mistake,” said Diana eagerly; “he meant no such thing. But I am so sorry about this concert, as I have promised to go to Lady Jane Williamson's.”

“It was arranged we were to go,” said he, his brow contracting. “But it is no matter; only if you knew the labour and work I had to go through to get them. But it is no matter; and what is the entertainment you have preferred? I thought you had ceased to care for going out.”

“O, this is no party,” said Diana, a little confused. “Lady Jane is to take me.”

Something interfered at this moment,

and Diana was called away. Meantime the days passed by rapidly. The newspapers, as usual, described the coming motion as "fraught with perils to the stability of the Government," and warned the old wiry Viscount to set his house in order. The *Regent-street Chronicle* had pleasant speculations on the subject, and one article headed "The Break-down of *Laissez Faire*." In short, this cloud, which, according to the well-worn measure of dimension, had been no bigger than the Viscount's own hand, grew steadily, and spread until it made the Government skies as dark as pitch.

On the evening of the debate Diana was in a sort of excitement and flutter, as indeed she usually was when there was a little expedition before her. For Lugard politics had now no attraction. He rarely looked at a newspaper; and since his late experience he always turned away his eyes from the columns which had to do with

anything in the House. If any *gauche* person dwelt long on that subject in his presence, he would rise up impatiently and leave the room abruptly. His friends remarked good-naturedly that he was "devilish sore" on the matter. He had therefore never noticed the "crisis" that was drawing on, and if he had, would have turned away his eyes. On this evening down came Diana about five o'clock in her full regimentals, as they might be called, fluttering her plumage of burnous and flowers, and eager to be in time. Richard was out, but as Lady Jane's carriage came up he arrived at the door and met Diana in the hall.

"Why, where on earth," he cried,—
"where *are* you going at this hour?"

With a little guiltiness from the discovery, "We are going down to the House to hear the debate," said Diana hurriedly. "Only think! Good-bye; don't wait for me." As she looked back from the carriage, she saw him standing with a puzzled air.

“They are all alike,” he was saying to himself; “she knew the mean things I had done to get her those tickets; begged them from a fellow who will make me feel it to the end of my life, and yet she puts me aside for some whim that just strikes her. She has no steadiness; she does not care what I have done, what I am doing for her.”

He went away moodily to his club, and dined there by himself. Mrs. Kitty had her solitary meal, which might have been a relief. Lugard stayed there the whole evening, not choosing to return, mechanically looking at newspapers which he did not care to read. Indeed, most of those who knew him now took care to give him a wide berth. It was so troublesome, they said, talking to him, and he was so abrupt and sudden you never knew where to have him.

About ten the room began to fill and grow noisy as men came dropping in, dressed to go to amusement, or coming

from it, and gathered in knots to talk. He could not help hearing what a new arrival was proclaiming: "Bligh, Bligh—that's the name!" and the sound seemed to prick him like a lancet. "That's the name! As fine [a thing as was ever heard. It'll set them on their legs. The old chief went up to him and shook him by the hand, and they say if they weather this he'll be the new Solicitor!" Richard was drawing his breath hard, and tried to hear more manfully. A military member for some place now comes in: "I wish I could talk like that fellow. Did you ever hear such *tune* as there was in his voice? And, by Jove! how they did listen; you'd have heard a toothpick drop. But those lawyer-men can talk on end on anything. Were you in when he gave the picture of Benlevi? such a cool touching-up! Of course he had made it up before."

Lugard started up. It all flashed upon him. She, Diana, had gone to hear this

triumph! A thousand curses on this evil genius facing him at every turn! It was done to mortify, to ruin him, to wear his very soul out with vexation. Had he met Robert Bligh at that moment he might have called out to him, "Defend yourself!" and have struck him with his closed hand across the face.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEBATE.

DIANA and Lady Jane had reached the gloomy galleries and monastic halls of the House, and had made their way to the greater outside hall, where people were crowding and hurrying to and fro, and being constantly put back to that mysterious boundary-line of tiles within which MEMBERS alone,—sacred birds of the Capitol—were allowed to stand and lounge. It seemed to Diana, greatly excited by the presence of these hereditary legislators, that in this function they took an especial pride, being glad to display themselves within this mystic ring, and exhibit their privilege. The Attorney-General had come out to them much

worn and anxious, his hand full of papers. "We must be quick," he said, "as I have to reply to this man. He is speaking now."

Once more Diana was looking down into that rich chamber, crowded on this night as it had not been when the ill-omened "motion on soldiers' wives" had been brought forward. Every seat was filled. There was no buzz, such as had attended the performance of the luckless Richard. The captains were in their places, wearing the conventional air of inattention, their beavers thrust down over their eyes. Diana knew where to look for her heroes, or at least their hats, and made out "the sea-green incorruptible;" and the granite-hewn face of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the other great lawgivers crowded close, dressing up their ranks, rows of many faces looking mainly one way, to where a wiry gentleman, sharp and sour faced, was speaking in a clear thin voice, and with

many words. He was "denouncing the Government," fiercely drawing a glowing picture of the old days of English nautical ascendancy: "When, sir, as the British frigate hove in sight, and the little strip of bunting fluttered aloft, the dungeon-doors opened of their own instinct, and the captives walked down to the beach free!" Or it might be that some blind mulish barbarians resisted, and then a white puff and a ball of British metal came crashing from an English gun among the roofs. That letter brought a speedy answer. Now it was all changed. Instead of their looking for wooden or iron walls, the captives had to wait the next mail, and on the devoted town came showering a storm of official paper from the Foreign Office.

Diana was not a little moved by this picture of the departed greatness of her country; and her pretty lips curled when she thought of the outrage offered to her flag. It was fine that—the British-built

vessel quietly climbing the horizon, and extorting satisfaction as it were by a frown. The speaker was said to have made out a most damaging case; and sitting down, moved for the correspondence.

The Attorney-General rose promptly, and in a dry chipping tone slid at once into cold legal details.

“O, this is only John,” said Lady Jane, with coolness. “My dear, we must make up our mind to a long sermon. He can talk the whole day if he likes.”

“But where are they all going?” said Diana suddenly, and stretching forward as the legislators began to hurry out.

Some of the political ladies smiled.

“To dine, I suppose, dear,” said Lady Jane with perfect unconcern; “the great speakers will be coming on presently.”

There was indeed an indecent rout; a mortification which Sir John, to Diana’s surprise, did not seem to feel in the least.

It was very dry, very dull and mono-

tonous, though Diana did her best to make up by special attention. But the arguments hurt her head, they were so very close. Yet next morning it read uncommonly lucid, and very simple, convincing, and unprofessional; and the great leading journal said that the first law-officer of the Crown had done a service to the House in clearing the ground; and with a rare self-sacrifice, instead of spinning, had brushed away all cobwebs.

Then some one else spoke,—young Lord Cordurois, who made a smart, rattling, “cocky” speech, in which he “rattled” on for twenty minutes, using illustrations drawn from the slang of the day, and dotting the next morning’s column with “much laughter” and “loud laughter;” as when he said that the noble lord at the head of the Government reminded him of “the chicken-salad man”—a song then in high favour,—

“ If you touch she,
Now pray let her be ;
But if you touch *me*,
Why then we shall see.”

“ (Loud laughter, in which the noble Viscount heartily joined.) ”

“ How good ! ” said some of the political ladies, who knew this lively and spirited lord very well, and saw him at their houses.

When he had done, Diana remarked that a perfect Babel broke out, with cries of “ New member,” “ Spoke,” and the like ; which presently were lulled away as the portly gentleman under the canopy sonorously pronounced a name. Then she heard a quiet, calm voice, but one that was clear and musical, below her ; and a little excitedly she recognized the small figure. The political ladies were a little interested too.

“ One of the new men,” said one ; “ they expect something from him.”

It was indeed Robert Bligh—gracious, conciliating, good-humoured, and deferential at first ; but now beginning to fire a stray bullet, now a small firework, which made people smile and grow attentive. Now the wiry old Viscount jogs his head over his jaunty folded arms in approbation ; now “the sea-green incorruptible” uncoils himself slowly, raises his hooded head, and languidly turns his curious eye over, as asking, “Is this food for me ?”

The buzz gradually subsided as the new voice rose ; then came the laugh—genuine and hearty ; then the applause of “Hear, hear”—overpowering and tumultuous. No one could have guessed what a fund of sarcasm had been as yet undeveloped in Robert Bligh. Of course Lugard, and men like Lugard, would have said that all this had been prepared ; and so it was, in a certain degree.

We quoted in Mr. Lugard’s case what the intelligent author of “Thumbnail

Sketches in the House" had said of that rising young politician; but we must now give from the agreeable *Regent-street Chronicle* what it thought of the new player who had joined in the game.

"When the House met last night, it was easy to see that a warm night's work was expected. To use a homely and well-worn metaphor, there was to be many a main fought, and both Ministry and Opposition had their respective birds trimmed, dressed, and ready spurred. . . . But we must congratulate Mr. Merry, the Government whip, on the new and brilliant auxiliary which fluttered into the pit last night with fiery eye, undaunted spirit, and untiring vivacity. The feature of the night was certainly the *début* of Mr. Robert Bligh, a young barrister in leading practice, just risen from his briefs, and whose harmonious voice and winning manner would alone be a treasury in that diapason of croaks, growls, huskinesses, conversational ex-

postulation, and *sotto-voce* unintelligibility, which constitute the diatonic scale of House-of-Commons eloquence. But this was the smallest feature ; for almost at once he grew epigrammatic and pleasantly sarcastic ; as when he described the authors of such motions as like a party of idle boys who have borrowed or stolen a gun, with which they go out to shoot sparrows, and who sometimes wound a human being through carelessness. This told well with the House. Nothing, too, could be better than the illustration drawn from his own profession as to the interest expressed by the Opposition for an obscure creature like Petrucci, which he likened to the interest of the low-class solicitor who takes up what are called speculative actions, and looks out for paupers and such persons who may have some fancied cause of complaint against substantial people who may be ‘good marks for costs.’

“ His elaboration of this topic, and intro-

duction on the scene of the right honourable gentleman who leads the Opposition, as another solicitor of a 'more respectable complexion'—who, when he sees the case is likely to assume unhoped-for proportions, prepares to intervene—was excellent. Good, too, as a piece of etching was his picture of the "dirty foreigner" creatures, who, under this semi-British protection, scheme, pillage and oppress, in these far-off places, and when the richly-deserved, and too long-delayed, bastinado falls on their soles yelp and shriek for the aid of their protectors. 'Then,' continued Mr. Bligh, 'do our Bucentaurs and Terribles and Thunderers weigh their mighty anchors, and spread their noble canvas, and prepare to make their hundred-and-twenty, or seventy-four, throats bellow. The great jaws open, the incipient roar is imminent, the Thunderer of England is about to echo, all because a mean clerk—analogous in position to some of our most doubtful commission-agents,

whose stock-in-trade is a large brass plate, and office-desk and two chairs—has been taken by the shoulders and turned out roughly. But let him add to these valuable properties a small but precious pocket-handkerchief—a parti-coloured article, striped in various hues—and he has an amulet or talisman that will work wonders. He has but to seat himself on a corner of this tiny carpet, and, like the hero in the fairy-tale, it will carry him wherever he will. That handkerchief is the British flag, and to use it for such purposes is indeed to make a clout of it.’

“There were more plums in the new pudding the honourable member for Calthorpe set before the House in his maiden speech, which contrasted favourably with the scanty currants dotted through the hardbake of other hon. members. We place one or two of these at the service of the country gentlemen. His likening a certain discontented right hon. member who brings

on motions damaging to his own party, when he thinks himself neglected, to the Italian organ-grinders, 'whom you have to pay to go away,' was happy enough. His allusion to the late notorious escapade of the leader of the Opposition when he was head of the Government, and his sacrifice of a tried colleague to preserve his position, was quite 'smart.' Mr. Bligh likened him to the skilful gentleman we see sometimes in the circus 'on a bare-backed steed,' who, after much hesitation, leaps through a paper hoop, and lands on the insecure support of the flying animal, with difficulty preserving his balance. All this, if not of a very high order of wit, was certainly lively, and will of course secure for the speech the distinction of what gentlemen who supply 'London letters' to the country papers call 'an absorbing topic of gossip at the clubs.' "

CHAPTER XI.

PLAINTIFF AND DEFENDANT.

AFTER the speech there was a flutter in the gallery: various members came up to see their "ladies," and there was a rustle as of going. In a moment Diana had given a start. She saw a face at the door. Other faces were turned eagerly to it. He was coming to her—to get her congratulations—to share his triumph with her. O! she could forgive all that had passed; but to her surprise he went by with a bow. When he had passed her by with this stiffness, Diana felt a curious chill at her heart, something whispering her that she was now outside *that* circle. It then flashed upon her—what was till that moment a mere phantom,

and what she could only smile at hitherto—that he had indeed succeeded in “curing himself.” Then, with something like a pang, she found this was all but a conviction of the most fatal logical accuracy. Of course one so resolved to succeed—so firm of purpose—could have no difficulty in arriving at that. Then she saw him pass by and go on beyond to a lady whom she had never noticed before, and whom she was sure was the Miss Henniker of the *Cuckoo*. Shall it be said that the moment was a turning-point in the life of our Diana; that she saw now the vanity, the folly of that state of pleasant fitfulness, that agreeable “not knowing her own mind,” with liberty to change with every hour; that claim to the privilege of holding every one subject to her little airs who were to know their mind with regard to her without there being any corresponding reciprocity on her side? For all this she now seemed to see that a penalty had swiftly overtaken her.

Diana, during the lulls in the debate, which were weary enough, had noted two foreign-looking ladies, one old and the other young, who sat at some distance from her. Something in the younger girl attracted her, who had rich brown hair, soft eyes, which now and again lit up with vivacity ; and, though tall, had a certain foreign elegance. She noticed the deep interest, the absorbed air, at the most striking portions of the speech ; how she leant forward with clasped hands and eager eyes, and how her face reflected every emotion. What was her surprise when, after Bligh had passed, so coldly and so gravely, she saw this young lady run to meet him enthusiastically, and leave the gallery with him ! In older days the pretty lips of Diana would have curled ; the prettier head would have been tossed back ; she would have been ineffably scornful on “ Mr. Bligh’s taste.” Now she felt a sort of pang, and surprised herself looking after the two with a sad and wistful air, and

with a blankness at her young heart she had never experienced before.

“Yes,” she thought bitterly, “he is quite in earnest, as he always is. He has forgotten and given me up for ever, and it was my own fault.”

Lady Jane roused her from this reverie.

“Come, dear, we shall go home,” she said; “we have had enough, I think; and though my poor dear Attorney is to reply, we must be spared *that*. We had him once. You shall come home with me. I asked in a few friends, and we can talk it over.”

They came out, down through the crowded, bustling lobbies, past the mysterious cave-like doors which led into the sanctuary. Two eternal streams seemed to be crossing there—coming out, going in: the young, the handsome, the gay, the dull, the old and tottering; not the seven ages, but half a hundred fully; and then, as they fluttered across, an eager figure rushed up

to Diana, and more eager eyes were looking into her face.

“This is the amusement, is it?” said his excited, angry voice. “We have an interest, it seems. So you stole off to hear our old friend? Well, I never thought you could do that—Never!”

Lady Jane was listening haughtily.

“Hush, Richard!” said Diana.

“I don’t understand these things,” he went on in a loud voice. “A man that has behaved so to you, that should be outside the pale of society—”

“Who is this gentleman?” asked Lady Jane in a low voice. “There is our servant, and the carriage is waiting.”

“Come away now,” said Lugard. “Mrs. Lugard is here too, and will take you.”

But Diana was in the mood to resent this, and might have answered a little impatiently, when she saw his face contract with almost a spasm, and his foot descend on the tiles with a fierce stamp.

She looked round, and saw Robert Bligh returning from the door. Every one that met him had a hurried greeting for him and congratulation. Even to their ears came the eager words, "Capital!" "Never heard anything better!" "You have set them on their legs again."

He stopped irresolute when he saw Diana and her party; but at this moment one of the great men—a stooping, elderly gentleman, whose back seemed composed of two shoulder-blades and nothing else—had him by the buttonhole.

At the same moment Diana's sympathies all turned backwards, and she felt for the poor "failure" beside her, in her tender heart. It was trying for Richard, and on this ground.

"For God's sake come away," he said in a low voice. "Don't speak to him; I can't bear it."

Robert was coming to them, and Lady Jane had beckoned to him; but with rare

delicacy he checked himself, raised his hat, and passed into the House.

Diana took Lugard's arm, spoke to him with all her best kindness and sympathy, but Richard freed himself; and when he saw that Lady Jane was taking her home, made no remonstrance, and walked away slowly.

"Who is he?" said Lady Jane, as they got into the carriage; "seems rather good-looking,—in the wild-man-of-the-woodsway."

Lady Jane was a very pleasant "lady of the house;" small in figure, intelligent, and with a half-sarcastic, half-burlesque strain running through her conversation, which made it very agreeable and amusing. The little social theatre that she opened drew better than that of many other ladies. Round her sofa was always a standing group, and a representative group too,—men of politics, men of wit, men of science, men of letters, and that newer stratification, the man of politics and letters com-

bined. You called in the afternoon, and found some tall gentleman with an Assyrian beard in an armchair, who withdrew with an aggrieved air when another of the same sex and on the same errand entered. Ladies only added to his appreciative audience, and there he had no objection. A few of this set were to be at Lady Jane's on this night—"coming on from the House," or going on to Lady D.'s.

To return a moment to our triumphant Bligh. When welcomed in the Ladies' Gallery with much effusion by the young foreign lady, he had scarcely shown signs of pleasure. His was rather a practical nature; and "worship," "incense," &c., so grateful to the nostrils of his fellows, he never cared for. With a sort of impulsiveness she poured out her praises and her delight: "It was so charming, so successful." Even her older relative thawed a little: "Eugenie insisted on coming; she was determined."

“You can have no interest in these things,” said he absently, and looking towards the door by which Diana was departing. He was thinking too how curious it was that these two should be thus in sight of each other. “What can you care about a speech of mine? Will you excuse me now?”

“O, will you not see us down?” said the young girl in a grieved tone; “we know no one—even don’t know the way out of this strange place.”

Bligh, not over-pleased at this companionship, bowed, and gave her his arm. Again the young girl broke out into her praises.

“O, you must be so clever, so brilliant; if you only heard all I heard! But I was going to ask you,” she continued, in a low voice, and looking round timorously, “and I am sure you would assist me if you can.” She now spoke very hurriedly, as if fearful of being overheard. “I am a stranger, and begin to feel very frightened. They will

not let me do as I will; they will not tell me what is going forward, and I know will force me into what I *cannot* like. O, if you would only let me see you, let me go to you—”

Bligh stopped her, and answered very coldly. “I am sorry,” he said, “but all this is quite out of the question. It is better for you to understand now. Any interest I can take in this matter must be on a side totally opposed to yours. Any assistance I can give must be to those whom you are striving to defeat. You must consider I have only had the pleasure of meeting you twice, whereas I am bound by long friendship to the family you are striving to eject.”

Eugenie looked a little pained at this speech.

“I am not striving at all; it is my right, is it not? They tell me so. Ah, I see; *you like her*. You love her; you cannot deny it.”

It was at this moment they passed Lady Jane and Diana in the lobby, as we have seen.

The foreign young girl's eyes were on his face. She followed his look, and then said suddenly, "Ah, there, I know *now*; there she is."

Plaintiff and defendant now passed close, and were looking at each other steadily.

As Bligh went down the steps to the carriage, he said firmly, but as graciously as he could, "Now I hope you have understood, and that if I should be obliged to take any step opposed to your interests you will see the reason."

"But listen," said she in an eager whisper; "I will do what I can—what you like; only tell me."

"What *I* like!" repeated Bligh in astonishment. "Do you mean that you will—"

Her companion was close behind, and here struck in sharply. At Bligh she

looked with something like hostility. He looked after them mechanically as they drove away.

“She means,” he thought, “the thing could be settled. But it would be unworthy and unfair on my side. No; I shall not interfere.”

Then Harding Hanaper seized on him, and drew him away.

CHAPTER XII.

LADY JANE'S.

AT Lady Williamson's the usual scene—one of her pleasant evenings—was going forward. There were not more than twenty people: three or four members of Parliament; a literary gentleman or two (semi-political also); an actor, who was “by way of being a gentleman,” said some of the malicious, but who was a very agreeable person and much admired; and a few pretty wives and young ladies; for Lady Jane made all these distinctions. Her “pretty wives and maids” were almost proverbial. Diana had become the prey of one of the Nineveh-bearded gentlemen, who much approved of her, and whom Lady Jane had brought to

her, saying "she wished her to like him—*so* wished her to like him." That hero, much fancying Diana's *ingénue* air and appearance, and sure that there was about her a refreshing "babble o' green fields," had laid down his little carpet, and, metaphorically, stripping to his "fleshings," prepared to give all his most effective "low-rope" acts. But Diana was *distracte*. Her heart was far away; she was still thinking of the brilliant *feux d'artifice* she had just witnessed; the colours, the sound of those cascades of yellow and green and blue fire was in her ears.

"The angel ended, and in Adam's ears,
So charming left his voice."

She did not notice the feats of the agreeable pantomimist who was beside her, and who indeed was so engrossed with his private tumbling that for a short time he did not perceive her want of attention. It broke on him with an almost painful suddenness.

He thought her "a bad style" of young girl, with nothing in the world of the "green fields" about her; and rather hurriedly getting on his social greatcoat over his web suit, and bundling up his carpet, he went away to another quarter. "He had not got a copper by his performance," said Mr. Wally Pepys, who took his place, and from whom we have indeed borrowed these rather forced histrionic metaphors. To him Diana was generally more attentive. In truth, in her young heart had taken place the change that a certain class of religious experts tells us takes place in the devout. She had been as it were awakened; she saw things so differently; she had at last arrived at the beatific vision — on this earth at least. The habitual flightiness of her young soul seemed to be gone for ever. Quite another Robert Bligh had taken the place of the plain, practical being of the old time. Instead of a homely creature of earth, here was a sort of bright

archangel. Again we say, rare, delicious, most exquisite success! How it brightens, how it gilds! It turns the ugly into beauties; it changes contempt into respect and admiration. Those wonderful philosophers, the French, wise and worldly in their most trivial sayings, have summed it all up in a line — “What succeeds like success?” What indeed? What fails like failure? Success means *power*; and therefore we admire and love. We can no more help it, nor could Diana, than we can force our eyes to dislike the soft greens of earth or the soft blues of heaven; and now she is startled from this sort of reverie as the door opens, and the right honourable the Attorney - General enters from the House, bringing in the hero of the evening.

“My dear,” he says to Lady Jane, “I got hold of our friend here, and brought him off from our Government people.”

Lady Jane was delighted. To any one

bringing in a new king of beasts to her little menagerie she was grateful.

“You are to be the great man of the day, Mr. Bligh, they tell us. You were really charming to-night. Now, sit down here, and let me talk to you.”

Diana noticed a very animated conversation, that went on for many minutes (at little parties of this sort minutes must do for half-hours). Then Lady Jane called over Diana.

“We are turning this orator’s head,” she said; “but he is not spoiled yet. But, I say, who would conceive he had all this bitterness locked up?”

Thus establishing a connection as it were between two new-charged cylinders, Lady Jane, like an artful hostess, disconnected herself, and went to another quarter.

“I am so glad you liked it,” said Bligh ironically, “though indeed they make too much fuss about it. By the way, I am glad

I have met you ; and, indeed, that was the reason I came in here to-night."

"O," said Diana, glowing with pleasure, "how good you are always to me ! And I know I don't deserve it."

"O dear," said he, "there is no question about that at all ; it is merely a matter of duty ; and I had hesitation ; and—shall I say it ?—a good deal of pride was in the way, for after the fashion it was considered I behaved ; I say considered—"

A new conviction as well as a new ideal of Mr. Bligh had entered into Diana's heart.

"I never thought of that," she said passionately. "At least I did," she added ; "but I was forced to think so ; and it seemed so strange, but *now*, I assure—"

"And what, pray," said Mr. Bligh, with some colour mounting into his pale cheeks, "what has caused this change ? Has any new fact come before you ? Have I vindicated myself ? No, I should say not."

Miss Diana Gay, you did me cruel injustice, and I had determined never to condescend to explain or excuse myself, for, give me leave to say, you might have known me far better."

"I deserve all this," said Diana in the same earnest way; "indeed I do."

"But," said he in the same grave tone (Lugard would have said "schoolmaster"), "I felt I should be above all such petty resentment. After all, your dear father was very good to me, and I loved him; and therefore, Miss Gay, to-night I put my pride in my pocket. That expedition to France was not for what you—or I shall say *they*—supposed, but to see my mother—to find out if all I suspected were true. I grieve to say it was true. So far from conspiring against your interest, that interest has lost me the love of the best friend left to me in the world. My mother, as I know well, never goes back from what she says—never recalls speech or promise,

and never forgives when she says she will not. In this way I conspired against you."

Now Lady Jane, not relishing a too-protracted confidence or isolation among her guests, comes up and says, "Come with me, Mr. Bligh; there's Mrs. Penwilliams dying—you and I have often laughed at that word—dying to know you." But Diana saw Mr. Bligh smile off this proposal. "I must," he said, "let the poor lady expire, and, what I think worse of, disobey you. Reprieve me for ten minutes, Lady Jane."

"So much for that," he said, turning to Diana, "and I shall promise you never to refer to it again."

"O, but you must," said Diana; "I could go down here on my knees before you to ask your pardon. It was so unjust—so wicked—I can *never* forgive myself."

She saw him look round in alarm lest she should be heard.

“Do, please, never speak of it again. We both understand now; and I shall promise never to refer to it. Now I have something else to deal with. I am sure you will believe I have a sincere interest in you, and wish only your welfare. Now this trial that is coming on: I am afraid your friends and advisers do not seriously consider the dangers. I do not wish to add to your troubles; but I am afraid it looks very serious.”

“I don’t care,” said Diana; “and if you would let me tell you what I wish, let me clear myself, and—”

“It was agreed,” he said, “we should never allude to that. It is past. Now, if I might dare advise—and I know a little of the person, Miss Gay who is the plaintiff here—”

“You do?” said Diana. “When? What is she like?”

“You saw her to-night; she came up to me in the gallery.”

“*That* was she?” said Diana, quite excited; “and you know her?”

“I see,” said he, “you have not quite given up the old suspicions. No matter; it is only human nature, and what I must expect. Let me tell you, then, I met her on board the packet, and later at the solicitor’s, who had sent me a brief in her case, which I returned. You force me to tell you all these things.”

Diana still showed disquiet, it seemed to him suspicion.

“And you know her?” she repeated. “She is certainly good-looking, and seems good and nice.”

“She is both,” he said gravely, “as far as I can judge, and, as far as I can judge, I should say a compromise was possible. She would be willing.”

“This she said to you to-night?” asked Diana, with surprising quickness for her.

“Yes.”

“I shall never compromise my rights,”

said Diana with a trembling lip—"never; and I authorize you to tell her so."

"I have no authority to say this to you, it is only what I gather. Therefore I cannot tell her anything."

"Then we shall leave it so, and, like the other subject, not recur to it again."

"I am certainly a little unfortunate in all my well-meant attempts for your interest."

"Well-meant!" said Diana with a little effort at scorn.

"Yes, well-meant," he repeated gravely. "And now for a third and last bit of advice. I tremble to approach it; but it is really all duty."

"Pray go on," said Diana, scarcely thinking of what she was saying.

"I hardly know how to begin; but as I (think of me as some old reverend friend, which indeed I am fast becoming, you know) hear things at clubs and other places, and so on, I must tell you I think it was a

heavy misfortune in many ways that poor Lady Margaret had to break up her establishment."

There was a pause.

"I suppose," said Diana, "you mean a little more than that; but I don't see it."

"Remember," went on Bligh, "I am the old gentleman and friend, lecturing and giving advice. Once this is over, I promise not to trouble you again: indeed, politics bid fair now to become my Mephistopheles. But what I mean is, about your staying with your old friends the Lugards. I think it is injudicious. You are very young; and, forgive me, he is not exactly the sort of person to be your companion and protector."

Diana gave one of her little scornful tosses of the head.

"I understand. But you never liked Richard Lugard."

Robert Bligh rose hastily.

"I have done my part," he said. "I see

I was wrong. I had no right to interfere. We must end our long, long conversation; and I wonder what they could have thought of us. The 'dying' Mrs. Penwilliams claims me, and I go. I promise you solemnly it is the last time I shall sin again as to advising."

He nodded pleasantly to her.

"O Robert," she cried, "I did not mean—"

But he shook his head in the same pleasant way, as though it were all a joke, and walked away to Mrs. Penwilliams.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NIGHT SCENE.

MRS. RICHARD LUGARD had long since begun to show signs of ill-health, and kept a good deal to her room. She had grown more excitable too, or rather "more odd," as some of her friends called it. This view was at last forced upon Diana, who had been unwearied in her efforts to soothe her, and followed out her little charitable but foolish scheme of turning that home into a happy one. Having had her own share of troubles, our Diana thought she had begun to learn what the world was very tolerably, and was entitled to give sound advice.

"You see, dear Kitty," she would say to

her friend, "I don't think you go quite the right way with Richard; he requires a certain little humouring and leading. You understand?"

Mrs. Lugard would look up at her quickly:

"You know, then, it would seem? You have found it successful?"

Diana, thinking this an earnest though ungracious request for information, would bend forward eagerly and explain her little tactics. When she had dwelt on them some time, and added that she knew Richard's character so well, having known him so long, and that he should be allowed his way in small things, and hinting that a cheerful smiling welcome was a wonderful reformer, Mrs. Lugard turned quietly to her, and coldly said—

"Why should I take this trouble, when there is a friend ready to come into our house and do it all for me? How good-natured of her, is it not?"

Diana was not a little taken back at this thrust.

“ You know you begged of me to come to you,” she said after a moment; “ but if you wish—”

“ Yes,” said Kitty impatiently, “ now be sensitive, and say you will leave the house—leave me to his amiable mercies; that will be charming; as if our house is not yet hell upon earth enough! God knows what scandal will follow then. Yes, yes, you do some good here, even for decency’s sake. But you know me, and you say have known me long, and you cannot make a *little* allowance for what I suffer, and I must carefully measure my words with you even.”

In such scenes, of which there were many patterns, what could Diana do but, with a heart filled with compassion, commiserate her unhappy friend?

When Diana returned home from Lady Jane Williamson’s it was past one o’clock.

She came up into the drawing-room bright, smiling, yet half dejected, and found the lamps lit in the drawing-room. Lugard was walking up and down. Diana was a little scared when she saw him, for there was an angry look in his eyes.

“You are very late, Miss Gay,” he said.

“I fear so,” said Diana; “though I did not think it was so late. But, indeed, if I had known you were to wait up—”

“Wait up?” said he; “surely you know that is not so unusual with me. But will you pardon an abrupt question: why did you conceal all this from me?”

“I never meant to conceal anything,” said she, with some pride.

“O, I know,” he said, with an ironical bow, “I have no right to bring any young lady to account. But still I have, I think; when you tell me that such a person is your enemy, and that he has behaved like an enemy, and that you mean to treat him as such, I think some little air of consistency

should be kept up, or you should give me notice."

Diana answered eagerly, "O, I am so glad to own and discover that we all did him wrong; he has explained everything!"

"O, he has? And you listened to his story? But before he told it to you you went to hear him make his exhibition—in *my place*, too! O, Diana, I did not think you would try such a deception on me."

"I mean no deception, indeed," said Diana gently, for the allusion to "my place" had touched her heart, and she felt it must have been a mortification; "only I felt so curious, and I thought at the same time that you might not like to know of Robert's—"

"Robert's!" said he with infinite bitterness; "Robert to the man that has plotted your ruin, that could be had up at this moment before any court, he and his wicked mother, for conspiracy! Page says so; and I tell you we are not done with them yet."

“O,” said Diana eagerly, “this is what grieves me so. I tell you this is all imagination. He has explained everything. *She* has even cast him off because he took my side. No, Richard, you must not be unjust; and, indeed, we both owe him some *amende* for our treatment.”

Richard was growing more excited every moment, striding up and down the room. “Here are fresh and fresh surprises every minute. *Now* I begin to see. All this time, from ever so far back, you have been devoted to that—fellow, while I, poor fool that I have been, have let all my prospects, all my hopes in life, be destroyed running after a mere phantom.”

This language, which might have alarmed another lady, seemed to Diana merely a development of Lugard’s usual intemperate strain, meaning nothing beyond general discontent and anger. Yet she had not seen him so excited for long, and tried to soothe him.

“Don’t talk in this way, you make me so unhappy; and you know I have troubles of my own.”

“And what troubles have I had?—though no one thinks of that. Disappointed, mortified, deceived, and I can trace it all to one, one thing. If *you* had—”

“Dear Richard,” said Diana, a little alarmed, “it is no use talking of that now; you know I have told you so again and again.”

“It is no use for *you*, of course. My career is ended; yours is beginning. It falls very light on you; but I warn you, Diana, do not think of *that*, or let it near you, for there is a point beyond which I will not be trifled with; so I warn him, or you may warn him if you like. I may bear what I *have* to bear as well as I can, and as I must; but take care, Diana, for it would be the most fatal day for *him* since he was born, if you were to think of *that*. I tell you plainly I could not bear *that*.”

He was so wild and strange that Diana shrank away; and yet she pitied him, he had been so harassed; and she could not find it in her heart to take up that tone of dignity, or affect an air that "she ought not to listen." She had not the strength, in fact, to take up the bold or haughty part. But she attempted a faint protest: "We are old friends, I know, Richard; we have known each other from children—you from a boy, I from a girl—so that—"

"So that I am quite harmless, and what I say is all folly and nonsense? Then I tell you, Diana Gay, I take no such view, and I hold you responsible for all this wretchedness. You made a sort of plaything of me—it was all your sport—and would carry on the sport now, and you do not care."

"Hush, hush!" said she, "you must not speak in this way. Indeed, it is time that I should leave this house, for I seem to have failed in doing what I hoped to do—to make you more happy and reconciled to your state."

He again gave a loud and bitter laugh.
“O, that was it? O, indeed!”

“But, now,” said Diana, growing excited,
“I see my folly and childishness, and that
I ought not to remain here an hour longer;
and they were right.”

“*They* were right?” he repeated. “I
see at last. Then he has been advising you
—he has dared to tell you this? He will
drive me mad, this fellow! What business
has he to interfere? But, never fear, I’ll
make him account to me. And so he has
persuaded you to leave us? Well, do. Give
him that triumph, you cruel, unsteady girl.
Leave us, then, and I know what I shall do.
I shall know with whom to reckon first of
all, and then what to do with myself. Yes,
Diana. This life is getting unendurable; I
am in that state of mind that I know not
what I shall do; harassed on all sides, miser-
able, you know not what I suffer. It only
wants *that*—your leaving us—and you shall
see what will follow.”

“No matter now,” said Diana, eager to end this interview; “we will talk of this in the morning.”

“As you will, Diana; but mind, *if you leave us, I leave also.*”

Diana started, and gave a cry. There was one else, also, who had started; and in the doorway they saw the tall figure of Kitty wrapped in a shawl, her face pale and menacing. Diana, on whom the whole effect of this fatal situation now flashed, ran to her; the other sternly waved her back.

“So you will leave,” she said to him, “if she leaves? Thank God I have heard these words. For long I have known that you wished me to leave—leave this world, if I could.”

“O, it was very cruel of him,” said Diana passionately, “and wicked to speak so! And I appeal to you, Richard, to bear me out; I never wished to listen to you, or to encourage this in the least; say so, speak, and do that justice.”

It was curious to see the change now that she was in presence of this dramatic situation. The *danger*—the crisis, as it seemed to her, so new and desperate—had given her an unwonted purpose and strength of mind. Her eyes flashed, she seemed to have grown of a sudden years older in heart and purpose. The childish Diana had been transformed.

Lugard looked at her gloomily, and did not reply for a moment. "I do not care who knows it, and there is no need for any acting here. I have not patience for it; and it is only carrying out a farce to pretend anything of the sort. *She* knows," he said, pointing to his wife, "what I feel, and what I have felt all through."

"Stop, stop!" said Diana passionately, to whom every moment brought a fresh revelation; "how can you be so cruel, so wicked?"

These words seemed only to make Lugard more desperate.

“ Ah, you say this now, Diana, after all the mischief is done. Who is it that has been most cruelly dealt with, I should ask? Who has been sacrificed? I say again, *she* knew all this; and there is no injury done to her, because her eyes were open. I am *sick* of acting parts, and it is more honest to say the truth out boldly. She knows, and she knew then, that I wanted to marry *you*, Diana, and that—”

“ And that,” said the Kitty Crowder of old times, in a trembling, scornful voice, “ and that, if one obstacle were out of the way, you would do. It is more honest to speak the truth, is it not? ”

Diana again broke out in the most passionate terms, “ O, *now* I see at last; now my eyes are opened! Richard, to think you should have been so wicked! O let me go; let me fly from this dreadful house; it will kill me to remain a moment longer here. But where shall I go? What is to become of me? ”

“And what is to become of *me*?” said he, advancing to the door. “If I am left here to this life—no, no, if you leave, take care, Diana; I don’t know what will follow. And if you leave in anger—I say, take care again—take care, for I cannot answer for myself.”

Here was something dramatic for the young heroine. The time was an hour past midnight—the actors, that excited wife and the wilder husband, as it seemed to Diana. She was so shocked, so confounded, at all these new discoveries, she did not know what to do, and could only murmur, “What is to become of me? Where shall I go? O, to whom shall I go?”

Not one of the party had perceived that the maid-servant had entered and had spoken. She said again, “This gentleman wishes —” But she was as confounded as any of the rest, for she had heard the last two speeches.

Suddenly Lugard started forward furiously. "He come here! O, this passes beyond all! He is at the bottom of all, and—Heaven above!—the time has come for me to punish him."

It was Robert who was standing in the doorway. He entered calmly and slowly.

"First," he said, "to explain my presence here at your house. It is for her—Miss Gay's—interest that I am here. A discovery I have just made is to her case of the greatest importance, and I thought a moment should not be lost—"

"And you have the insufferable effrontery," said Lugard, really beside himself, and advancing on the other with fury, "to meddle in this business, though you have been warned? I tell you, man, this is going too far, and I cannot control myself. You will drive me to do you a mischief."

"Folly!" said Bligh, half contemptuously. "I also am tired of this hectoring,

which has gone on far too long.—Miss Gay, you asked where can you go to from this house? I shall tell you. Mr. Bowman and Lady Margaret have returned this evening, and are at their hotel—Starridge's. You can go there at once; I will leave you there myself if you wish."

"Yes, yes, Robert; a thousand times yes;" and she went over to him.

Lugard strode forward, then checked himself, as he saw Diana cling to Robert's arm, and actually ground his teeth with fury. "Do as you please, then," he said to her; "I can't control you; but as for *him*, if I live another hour he shall pay me the long debt he owes me—nearly twenty years now—and with interest, too, Mr. Bligh."

Bligh was going, but he turned back, and said calmly, "And let me warn you, too, that the day for forbearance—which you in your wicked dulness set down to fear of you—has passed by. Take care, for

I shall treat you now in quite a different manner.—Come, Miss Gay.”

They passed down, and entered his carriage at the door. Neither spoke, but there was on their minds an impression of the dreadful situation. They left behind them that husband and wife, whose household gods were shattered about them, strewing the floor, a universal wreck of marriage, respect, love, happiness — everything — the very fragments of which to-morrow might break up in yet further ruin.

Bligh hurriedly told her how her friends had so opportunely returned, Lady Margaret something better in health. As for the matter concerning the business, he said he would see her in the morning. Indeed, Diana cared little: the scene she had passed through had changed her into a woman. Down had tumbled the thick walls of simplicity, unsophistication, pleasant unconcern, that enclosed the rural garden in which she had been living; and

she saw about her, grown up as if by enchantment, the great streets and buildings of life, the hum of traffic, the passing faces, the bustling figures—and not only saw but understood them, like the Eastern in the fairy tale whose head was dipped into the tub of water. The whole scenery of a life seemed to pass through her young brain. She saw the dream in which she had been living—the height, depth, thickness, the philosophy, above all, the folly of that strange intimacy. She now even shrank from it with terror. In the carriage as they went along she poured out her faltering gratitude to “her preserver and old friend,” as she called him. Bligh was calm and grateful, but cold as usual. It was a mere accident his coming in at that moment. He, and he always hoped to prove that he would be a real friend, he had had a note that night from Hawker, Q.C., who led on the other side, and who told him

that Judge Cosherer had fixed Wednesday for the case.

“I don’t care about the case,” said Diana impatiently; “but you had something else to tell me.”

“It was about the case also,” he said. “When I got home and took up the evening paper, the *Regent Street Chronicle*, I saw a paragraph about this business, in which they said that some Rev. Mr. Potter who was chaplain there was to be examined. The name made me start, for it seemed quite familiar to me, and I tried to recollect for a long time. At last I recalled it. Do you remember my looking through your papers at Gay Court?”

“Indeed I do,” said she.

“Well it was there. There were some letters from abroad, some from my mother, some from others; but the name I could swear to, and some passage not very favourable to him. I did not read it, but I know

my eye fell on it. I would get those papers looked into at once. They ought to have been looked to before."

Diana was not attending very much. She was thinking of the scene they just witnessed. Now they were at the yellow front of Starridge's private and distinguished hotel in Brook Street. Its lamps were shining out over the door. "Lady Margaret Bowman and suite" were arrived, and her ladyship had just sent over to Mr. Lugard's a note for Miss Gay. She went in, and she said "goodbye" to Bligh. She added softly, "O how kind you have been! I shall never forget."

As he turned to go, he thought he would walk home. It was a moonlight night—the night of a most delightful and exciting day. "He had conducted *that* case well"—the triumph in the House, the conversation with Diana, and that half-rescue with which all had closed. He was thinking as he lighted his cigar, "She will be a *true* woman

yet. It will work itself out." He then repeated, half aloud, as he set off,

"Yes, better let her work it out for herself, and I shall say and do nothing."

At this moment a figure crossed the street hurriedly; a hansom cab was driving away, from which it had descended. The figure was in front of him in a moment: a fierce face—wild eyes as of a madman.

"Now, Mr. Bligh," it said; "*now* there are no women to protect you."

Bligh threw away his cigar and drew back.

"I told you before I am getting tired of this, and that I have passed the point when I can put up with it longer."

"Who wishes you to put up with it?" said the other in a low voice. "I would ask nothing better than that you should not. You have just hit the nice point, Mr. Special Pleader, clever as you are."

Bligh spoke with great firmness.

"Go away," he said. "Leave me. I see

you wish to bring about some—I don't say quarrel—”

“Quite right, Mr. Bligh, the great barrister and member—quite so. I do wish to bring it to that, here, and in this street—a common vulgar quarrel—police and all that.”

Bligh looked round. The long decent street was almost deserted: on the other side the faint pattering of the steps of a passenger going home, and not concerned with the two gentlemen who were talking together opposite.

Bligh suddenly got past him, and then, putting him back with his hands, said—

“Once for all, understand this. Your conduct to me for so many years has been past endurance. Your insults, your unworthy jealousies and sneers, your more unworthy slanders behind my back”—and Robert's voice trembled—“I tell you all that is past now; so take and go your way. Let me go mine.”

“What talk is this!” said Lugard, now furious. “Take your hands off me. As if I had nothing to put up with from your mean, quiet sneaking ways all these— But I’ll end it now. You shall meet me in France—anywhere you please—but meet me you shall. Do you hear?”

“No,” said the other. “I shall do nothing of the kind. There is my answer.”

“*And there’s mine, you coward!*” said Lugard, and swiftly raising his arm, his hand descended as swiftly towards the cheek of Robert Bligh.

It was just the scene with which this little romance opened at Dr. Wheeler’s, now so many years before; but between, what an abyss of stormy passions, in one breast at least, had filled up! Before that angry hand had descended, another stout arm had been launched out in defence, and had struck it up with such violence that Richard reeled again, and, staggering back, with difficulty kept his feet. Bligh stood, still

calm, his hands ready, and without speaking a word.

“You struck me,” said Lugard wildly. “You shall pay for this—by God you shall!”

“Take care, I warn you,” repeated Bligh, in a low voice.

As Lugard was rushing on again, a policeman came out of an archway close by.

“Now, gents, what’s this about? Here, I say—”

“He struck me! He did! I swear it! I’ll charge him before any magistrate! I do it now.”

“Hush, hush!” said Bligh. “You are beside yourself.” Then to the policeman, “This gentleman and I were once friends, and he wishes now to draw me into a quarrel. He followed me here in a cab. I am Mr. Bligh, a member of Parliament—”

This title was to Lugard like scarlet on a furious bull.

“I charge him here, whatever he is, and you must do your duty. I shall appear against him at the police—”

“Why, I see you strike him first,” said the policeman, “and see you get out of the cab and cross the street. I was a-watching you, ay and see the ’ansom come up. Come, go about your business. Now, see here, you won’t come this way; so you may as well now. I’ll take care, sir,” added the policeman, touching his hat, “he shan’t trouble you. I see you myself in the Chancellor’s Court; so I know it’s true what you says, sir.”

No wonder that Bligh almost felt pity for his enemy’s degraded situation. He stopped irresolutely and said—

“Lugard, no one need know anything of this. But for your own sake I conjure you to give over this insane course of yours.”

“I shall reach you yet,” said Lugard, grinding his teeth, “though you do require police and women to protect you.”

“A hinformation in the morning before Mr. Bond ’ll be your course, sir,” said the policeman—“bind him over, you know.”

Bligh walked away slowly, and Lugard went off in the other direction, the policeman following him, and determined to “keep his eye on him” till he got home. Some evil spirit seemed to have entered to this man, whom “the gods seemed determined to destroy.” The furies of life were against him, and everything seemed bent on defeating him.

CHAPTER XIV.

GAY *v.* GAY.

By the next morning the baffled Richard Lugard was almost in a state of phrenzy. Those who were in his house heard him walking about talking to himself, nearly the whole night. Had they been listening they would have heard him saying :—"O ! show me some way. Let me live to destroy him ! It will drive me mad if I do not !" But the chief blow had come from Diana. "That *she* should have turned on !—oh, to scold me so cruelly, all at the persuasion of this *clerk*—that lawyer's drudge ! I'll never forgive her—never !" With the next morning came a letter, the writing of which he knew to be hers. She too had

been thinking over that scene, not without trouble and alarm. They were her old friends, and to Richard—with all his violence and ill-conditioned behaviour—she could not feel much resentment. She indeed regarded him as irresponsible. To that class of character, indeed, a girl's heart is unconsciously indulgent. Called on *officially* to sentence such a one, they are bound to be severe, but they think of the prisoner with interest. There were the dangers also with such a nature lest he should proceed to some violence; and, after all, he had been kind to her, and had really liked her, and liked her long. So she sat down and wrote him a long letter setting out all these things, saying how grateful she was for his goodness and the shelter he had given her; that, as for what he had said, she knew he was hasty and thoughtless, and did not think what he was going to do. But if he ever did like her, she was going to ask him a favour. She had her own troubles drawing

on, and she knew he would not wish to add to them, and this was that there should not be any quarrel between him and Robert Bligh. When he came to this point he half crushed up the letter.

“She wishes to protect him,” he said, “but it will not do.”

Presently he read on. She must know what people would say, and how her name would be drawn into it.

Almost as early, another letter reached him. He knew *that* hand also. His eyes lighted up, and he saw with a sort of exultation. “No, surely! But he has not spirit enough for that. He dare not. This is more of his wretched quibbling.” It was from Robert Bligh.

He said after the scene of last night it was quite necessary they should come to a clear understanding as to Lugard’s future behaviour. They had been old friends and schoolfellows, and he appealed to Lugard himself, if for all these years past he had not

shown a temper and patience few other men would have exhibited. "Yes," said Lugard, "because he could not help it—he hadn't the spirit." But they had now—since last night—passed the point of this endurance; he would bear no more, and he was obliged to give Richard Lugard this warning. Perhaps it would not be attended to on these grounds: but there was another reason which might have more effect—the name of one whom they both knew well would of certainty be drawn into it, if there was any scandal or any quarrel. On Lugard's head would rest that responsibility; and though he knew the motive that would be ascribed to this appeal, he was content to let such be ascribed to him, provided it had effect. Again, he said he was not hostile to Richard Lugard, and could even try and forget his unprovoked behaviour of last night, and would be glad to serve him. But let them give over these childish bickerings and jealousies, which were really unworthy of

grown men as they were. He made this last appeal, and did so in the name of one whom they both regarded.

It may be imagined what the effect of this appeal was on Richard, with what scorn and fury he read every word; yet somehow he felt himself entangled in the logic of it, and it forced itself disagreeably on him, that any *esclandre* would of course involve Diana's name. From this feeling he could not set himself free. The whole of that day he wandered about uncertain—now finding himself drawn to the House of Commons by a sort of fascination, to wait for his rival and enemy. But at last, and before the end of the day, he found a weary relief in thinking that as Diana's case was now coming on, he might at least wait for a few days. And so he determined to do. He would postpone all vengeance and conflict until that was over.

But now the great case was at last drawing on. The affidavits, and additional

affidavits, had been “filed;” all the usual excuses for delays, and the motions had been exhausted. It was “ripe” for trial; and though the *venue* would naturally have been laid upon the circuit to which Calthorpe belonged, still obvious reasons made both parties concur in selecting the little assize town of Bentham as the battle field. These arrangements the public learned from the *Regent Street Chronicle*, which one evening set before its readers the following little hot buttered roll:—

“Lovers of what are called ‘sensation trials’ will be rejoiced to learn from us, that the great bath into which they have been longing to plunge is at last nearly ready. Their slumbers will be of the sweetest when they hear that the case goes down for trial to Bentham, that it will have all the impartiality and acumen—we believe these are the correct words of judicial compliment—of Mr. Justice Cosherer, and that of course a high-minded and intelligent jury will re-

ceive his lordship's instructions. The *Bentham Gazette* will, of course, crowd its columns, and the evening penny papers will, as the phrase runs, drive a roaring trade, &c."

The *Regent Street Chronicle* was right. At last, like a great ship, the case was ready for launching. With infinite pains the instructors had every rivet driven home, every bolt closed. Both parties were ready, witnesses, counsel, pleadings. The "circuit" was moving slowly down on Bentham. Mr. Justice Cosherer said very often at dinner, "we have a very heavy ejectment at Bentham." Or in court, when "sitting," "you know, Brother Hawker, we have that Bentham case."

At last, Diana's gentle breast was still more fluttered by a note from Mr. Page, saying that it would be taken on Monday, and that he was going down to-morrow, with all the papers. Then, indeed, she felt a chill. There had been many reprieves, and

the fatal day seemed a long way off; now it had come at last. It was actually the morning fixed. The witnesses were in town: the court was crowded, the gallery was filled with ladies, and the sheriff had been giving out tickets. It was quite a festival for Bentham, where, as the barristers who went that circuit remarked, "there was never anything heavier than a few wretched larcenies," the bystander naturally concluding it was some mean, wretched, semi-barbarous spot. Our old friend, the *Calthorpe Mercury*, which had filled many a column with the glories of the House of Gay, had now sent a special reporter—"our own"—to chronicle its downfall. This faithless journal was always trimming its sails to the new and more favouring gales. "We understand," it said, "that the *probable owner* of Gay Court, that is, if we are to trust those who are best likely to form an opinion on the matter, is a young lady of gay French tastes, who will make a most desirable addi-

tion to the county. The new family—should a jury of Bentham lieges so decree it—are determined to seize the opportunity to restore to Gay Court some of its old attractions. As we have been told, it is the eye of the master makes the horse grow fat, and on the same principle, it is *the residence of the owner* that is the true source of the prosperity of this vast empire, on which the sun never sets.” Some of the malicious creatures who “adhere” to country towns and villages—a mortified doctor’s wife, who had *not* been asked to Gay Court on some occasion, or a shopkeeper’s daughter, who had not been recognized—cut this paragraph out and sent it to Diana. This mean behaviour on the part of the *Mercury* had the effect desired, and “mortified” her more than any stroke had done as yet. Those people, whom her father had fed, and whom, indeed, he had once assisted when the presses, types, &c., were about to be seized for a debt to paper-makers, thus to turn on her! But,

as we have seen, she was learning every hour the true character of the world, and these rough and rather cruel lessons were doing her a world of good.

On the incidents of this rather remarkable action, which attracted a good deal of attention at the time, it is not proposed to dwell minutely. The *Mercury* had it all in quite dramatic shape—the dialogue, the question and answer, all “textually” given. Telegrams, indeed, reached Calthorpe during the day, detailing its progress; the *Mercury* issued a special edition: they had even taken on another man, an addition, happily described as “*having specially increased our present large staff.*”

Hawker led for the plaintiff, and opened her case in a speech of remarkable ability. It lasted over an hour, and he took the jury during that space over the whole ground. Then came the witnesses. There were formal witnesses—people brought at great charges from France, bringing the books of

the consulate. Everything was clear. There was the marriage, on such a day, and in such a year, between the actress and the English officer, under his proper name—not Burgess, but Gay. Everything *en règle*—witnesses and all. Then there was the examination of the old French nun “by commission,” proving the reception of the young girl, Eugenie, the visit of the strange lady, and the payment of money. Then there was a sensation, as a pimpled, red-faced, elderly man, with a white cloth about his neck, came into the box. Every one knew this was the clergyman. The marriage was all regular—he remembered it perfectly. This, of course, had been already proved by the registry, but he had known young Gay, had been an intimate friend; and he proved many other incidental matters. He remembered the birth of the girl. He was severely cross-examined “as to his antecedents” by Diana’s counsel, and certainly made a lamentable figure. He, however, candidly

owned that he had not strength to resist; that he was fond of pleasures, and very poor, and had to get on as he could. Now, before his acquaintance with Mr. Gay how had he lived? Come now, out with it all—he might as well. The frankness of this man was, however, his defence. He kept nothing back. He had been chaplain of this place and that. Well, he had, he confessed it,—he *had* been dismissed. They said the accounts of the English chapel were confused. Was there not some awkward imputation of—let us say stealing, or embezzlement? He owned it, but he defied any man to say it has been proved. Why? Because they couldn't. Why again? Because there were people there who had made a party—against him. Why, the third time, hadn't it been proved? Was it because he had fled the night before the investigation? Well, he owned it, because he knew he would not get fair play. A vast deal of time was consumed in dealing with this gentleman, the

process, as in many cases, being most amusing, and even dramatic, for the idle and unconcerned spectators, but, in truth, having little bearing on the case.

Hawker sat down, after a "masterly cross-examination," and even to applause which was "with difficulty suppressed by the Court." Then the Court went to lunch, and it was known that a veiled lady, whom they saw under the Bench, was Mrs. Bligh, who was to be the next witness.

In the box she put up her veil, and looked round the court from Justice Cosherer to the ladies' gallery, regarding them all with a cold, hard look, that did not gain her much sympathy. She was defiant and haughty, but those from about Calthorpe who were present noticed a startling change in her. How worn she was, and how her eyes flashed and burned with a glowing fire! Her story was simple and unexaggerated, and, in the main, a repetition of what she had told her son. She told it

all with infinite clearness, and fashioned it herself into a most full and dramatic narrative. Then counsel rose to cross-examine—an operation it was expected would be performed with more than usual ferocity—so dangerous a witness must be broken down at all hazards; and when the barrister rose, drawing his gown up on his shoulders, as it were to free his arms for the struggle, a flutter and rustle of expectancy ran round. She, too, seemed to count on this, for her lips were compressed together firmly, and she seemed to wait the first blow with a cold and hard defiance. But, to the universal surprise, there was no “hostile” cross-examination—mere explanation was asked for. Why had she kept these matters back so long? Had she not known the Gays—had they not been friends in fail? She turned full to the judge and to the whole Court, and said, “I am glad I have been asked that question. We *were* the greatest friends. But I conceive, whether

rightly or wrongly, that I have been deeply injured by one of them, and then I felt myself discharged. I felt—and I own it candidly here—I wished that some punishment could be found for such behaviour.”

Richard Lugard, who had been in Court all the day, now stooped over, and, pulling the barrister by his gown, whispered to him. The barrister shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and waved him off. Mrs. Bligh went on, “I want no concealment in the matter. The Court is welcome to know my motives and reason. The world is quite welcome to them.”

“You must reserve your reasons, madam,” said the judge; “we shall not trouble you.”

Again Lugard touched the barrister, who said aloud, angrily, “I must beg you, sir, to sit down, and not interrupt me. No one wishes to have your motives, Mrs. Bligh—as for the Christianity or morality of such conduct, I thought—”

“For that I am not accountable to you,” said she, quickly. “I have offered to justify myself, and you will not listen. Is it *your* legal morality to make an insinuation then?”

The judge smiled.

“It is open to you to comment on it in your speech, but the witness is right in what she says—”

“Ask me, and I shall keep back nothing, I promise you that.”

The barrister, somewhat nettled, replied, “That’s all melodramatic enough, madam. I ask what I am instructed to ask, and no more.”

There were one or two other witnesses, and this simple case closed. As the counsel said in his speech, “they had” the fact that Mr. Gay had an elder brother; that that elder brother had married, and had children, and there was the child, the plaintiff. The case of the defendant was merely a speech—they called no witnesses—he could only

comment on the "shady" character of the witnesses, and then made a rather remarkable statement as to Mrs. Bligh. They had that lady's evidence, he said, but as men of the world they would see there was more behind it than they were allowed to examine into. For himself, he would merely say that no doubt they had been surprised at the temperate and forbearing tone of his cross-examination. But there were reasons for all these matters, and he would merely add that he had been left to his own discretion—

Here Hawker "must interpose." They had nothing whatever to do with his learned friend's discretion, granting there was such a thing. (Here loud laughter in Court.) They were not to go speculating as to evidence that had not been given.

The learned friend said he was perfectly entitled to comment on the strange exhibition of open malignity they had seen that day, shocking and unchristian as it appeared

to them all. He had a right to ask the jury to apply their minds in finding a solution for that hostility.

“I think not,” said Mr. Justice Cosherer; “you had not the opportunity, and you did not avail yourself of it.”

The barrister said, very well; it was of no consequence, and had very little bearing on the case, a common declaration with gentlemen of the long robe when defeated on a vital point. He then warmed himself up for the usual circuit platitudes, got on an effective picture of “the dismantled mansion—the deserted hearth, and the ejected young mistress, turned out on the world, full of her youth and beauty.” After about an hour’s galloping across this sort of country, he at last drew reins, and got off his oratorical nag very heated and exhausted. Then came the reply, which, following out the same metaphor, was a mere cool amble in the shade, and on a cob. It was, in short, in a tone of

quiet good sense, practical and plain, the best, in short, after some such impassioned display—as it were, making us all feel ashamed of having been led away by our feelings. Of course it was all very well to talk of a dismantled mansion and a blighted hearth. And then this common sense, which his learned friend had brought down with him in his bag, like his Archbold's *Nisi Prius*—and he must do him that justice, no one used them better, as his lordship and they all knew, who came that circuit. But they were all men of common sense. He knew his learned friend had an article called *uncommon sense* (*laughter*), for which he had the exclusive patent (*renewed laughter*), so exclusive that he would not allow him, or the jury there, or even his lordship, to use this valuable invention (*loud laughter, in which the Court joined*).

Mr. Justice Cosherer : “ And he has also patented his discretion ” (*roars of laughter, sustained for many minutes*).

After order had been restored, the learned gentleman asked, “What was the fact now? They all knew something of the world. Now, who was going to dismantle Gay Court?—who was going to smash up the hearth-stones and ranges in the way depicted by his friend? Why, the fact was, his client was going down there to live—if the jury would give her leave, which he was confident they would—and he could reassure his learned friend, who seemed so nervously anxious about the kitchen fire (*loud laughter*)—that, if he might use the expression, high jinks would forthwith set in there. He might promise him his little interest to secure him an invitation. (*Roars of laughter.*) Why, what talk was this! If he was informed rightly, the place had been deserted already by the defendant, who, it seems, was a young lady of high fashion, and went to balls and parties in London—things about which, he, thank God, found nothing in his law books, though his learned

friend might. (*Laughter.*) He frankly confessed he wouldn't know a polka from a poker. (*Laughter.*) His learned friend was well up in these matters; and, he was told, could waltz like an angel—(*roars of laughter*)—an odd sort of angel he must have looked, with his wig bobbing about—(*laughter*)—to the music, and his gown flapping out behind him—(*laughter*),—or mixed up with the ladies—(*laughter*),—while his legs joined in the demurrer, and would be set aside with costs. (*Roars of laughter, the learned judge being literally convulsed.*) “No one,” said the *Mercury*, “seemed to enjoy the fun more than the learned counsel who was the subject of this diverting picture.”) At last he concluded, and then Mr. Justice Cosherer, pulling in his chair, and arranging his papers, proceeded to charge the jury in a voice which, after the learned counsel's rolling tones, seemed to be in the next street.

CHAPTER XV.

VERDICT.

ROBERT BLIGH was busily engaged all that day. There was a delicate Puisne Judge anxious to retire, and it was said that the Solicitor-General was anxious for the post. It was understood that if the arrangement could be carried out, the young member who had made the brilliant speech was very likely to get the vacant Law Officership; the wish, too, of Sir John Williamson was already known. He was in "heavy" cases this day, and had had an interview with various spaniels, carrier-pigeons, turnspits, whips, and other functionaries who are so useful to a party; yet his thoughts were all on the trial then going on down at the little

circuit town. But he got a telegram, as was arranged between him and Mr. Page.

“We have made no case—judge charging dead against us—jury seemed made up.”

As soon as he got leisure, he wrote a hasty note to Diana:—

“MY DEAR DIANA,—The case is going on; but you must, as I told you before, not buoy yourself up with much hope. Be prepared for the worst, and then you will be prepared for the best. The result will be known in about an hour, when I shall come and tell it to you. Yours,

“R. B.”

She was sitting at Starridge's, with Lady Margaret, who was still quite helpless, and never again to force her way through the fashionable ranks. When Diana received this, she was quick-witted enough to understand—“He is preparing me for the worst,” she thought. “Well, God's will be

done. Before night I suppose I shall be a beggar ! ”

She got up quietly. Lady Margaret had lost her old restless curiosity, which made her ask about every letter that came to the house “Who is that from? what is it?”—and she made no remark. Diana went down to the room below, and sat there to read the letter again. Now it had all come home to her at last: *now* she understood: this was the sentence, and it seemed to her a sentence. “I suppose it is a fair punishment,” she said; “I was so frivolous and fitful, and going through life like a mere child. That could not go on; and my selfishness was to be punished. Well, heaven’s will be done.” Mr. Bowman came in, and she showed him the letter. He read it, and shook his head. “I know what that means,” he said. “When my poor sister was taken off, that’s the way the doctor wrote to me. You poor, poor little woman, my heart

bleeds for you. But you know as well as I do, where your home is to be now : with old Bowman, that loves you like his child. My pet, we'll make it up to you ; and, please God, I can do something in the way of settlement too ; and with your own child's portion—two thousand pounds—we'll make out something snug."

Diana was deeply touched, and went up to him, and silently kissed him ; but she had her own resolution formed.

"I must go up," he said, "and sit a bit with poor Maggie, and invent some news for her. Look here, I've got all the back numbers of the *Court Journal*. Why, there's a month's reading here."

Diana sat there for nearly an hour longer. It grew dark. She was trying to look her situation straight in the face. But it was very hard. "I must try and bear it," she said aloud ; "and perhaps I shall find strength to bear it."

"Yes, dear Diana," said a low voice close

beside her, "you will want all your little strength. Just think: riches are not everything in this world."

She took Robert's hand, and held it; "Then it is over?" she asked, faltering; "and against me?"

"Yes!" he said: "I knew how it would be. I was afraid from the very beginning. It is very, very hard—such heavy blows falling on one so young and so weak!"

His sympathy and compassion in these words touched her; or was rather the occasion that set free all her secret emotion; she burst into tears, and wept silently for some moments.

"Now, you must not," said he, in an expressive, soft, and kindly tone. "Sit down here, and let me talk. I must tell you about this miserable business—better to know it all at once. Yes, it is over; the jury found against us—the judge charged against us; and, from what I understand of it, I fear there is no hope for any future

proceeding. It is at an end. This is cruel speaking; is it not?"

"I know you mean it for the best, and it is the kindest course. O dear, dear Gay Court, so I have now lost you for ever! O, dear, darling papa; thank God for one blessing! that you are not alive for this stroke!"

"Yes," he repeated, slowly, "Gay Court is theirs. And, O! that I should have to say it to you, Diana—you have no home! You must think now what you will do for the present. Will you accept Mr. Bowman's offer? You should. There is no compliment in it. You have done much for them."

"No, no, Robert," said Diana, drying her eyes, and standing; "I shall be independent to the last. I shall go away to France—to some distant country, far away from this dreadful place. I shall have a hundred a year, they tell me. It ought to do—many poor creatures have less."

“Not for you, Diana,” he said. “Impossible! you have been brought up to luxury, recollect.”

“Then I shall learn to work—work for my bread; which I should have learned long ago.”

Again he looked down. “One like you would earn little. You are too slight to work.”

“Then I shall die,” said Diana, vehemently; “the dearest thing that can happen. You do not encourage me; but I know you mean well.”

“Yes,” he said, calmly; “and I wish, at this moment, you should know all that is before you, so that you can choose fairly. There is one other thing I heard to-day, which ought to be mentioned to you.”

“More misery,” said Diana; “I don’t care, indeed—”

“Not at all,” he said; “you remember that Lord Patmore. I have reason to know that he has been in an unsettled way, and

that he heartily repents having displeased you. I always said there was good in him, and that he had an honest heart, only overlaid with a weight of fashionable conceits and selfishness which prevented it working. A word would bring him here again. At least I'm confident—"

"Not if I starved or died!" said she, proudly. "And *you* propose this to me—you, Robert—"

"Then there is only one thing more for me to suggest. I have exhausted everything else. Yet you will receive it in the same way?"

"No, indeed," said she, putting out her hand.

"But you must hear to the end. I was thinking last night how long it is since we began to know each other; how far off it now seems since the time you used to come to Doctor Wheeler's; and how much has taken place since. My life has been tolerably monotonous, except during the last few

months; but still you would be surprised, Diana, if you knew how much you have coloured it—directly and indirectly.”

She hesitated. “Well, I dare say that was what used to be in those old pleasant days; but latterly, during the last few years, you have changed a good deal to me, Robert.”

“No!” he said, smiling; “I have always been the same—”

“But,” said she, “I mean you have changed, and I know the reason. You had an ideal of me. You thought as I grew up I would get steady. I have a purpose in life. But you were disappointed, and I seemed to you to be a child still. Ah! I found that out, Robert; though I was too proud to let you know that I felt it a little.”

“I was always the same,” he repeated; “always liked and admired you.”

“Not for this year or two, or you would not have neglected us so—given us up for these new friends and fashionable young

ladies, to whom the world gives you out. And since you have become successful, too, and since the time when the first rumours of this fatal suit—”

“You do me some little injustice,” he said; “though it is since the time of this fatal suit that I began to change in a certain sense. Yes, Diana, cold as I have appeared—selfish, too, perhaps—I have always secretly thought of you, and of you only. But you were far above me in every way—far. In wealth, in mind—everything.”

“O, Robert!”

“For this hour, shall I confess it, I have been waiting. Now I can speak. Now, at least, I may have the happiness of offering to share all I have, and all I shall have, with you. I own I have latterly been acting a part. For a time—that was long ago—I had some hope that you had a regard for me. Then I thought this mere folly, and that of such a thing you never

even dreamed. Later, again, I saw that I had indeed done you injustice—cruel injustice. Now, Diana, let me offer myself and all I have, and you will think no more of this misfortune.”

Her face lit up with pleasure and delight.

“O, Robert! How shall I ever thank you? How generous, kind, and forgiving! And to wait for this moment! Never, never shall I forget this! Indeed you are far above me. I am still a foolish, childish creature, though I hope to mend one of these days; and they tell me I am improving a little. But—but this can never be, Robert—never!”

“Never be! O, Diana!”

“Impossible! Never! I am determined. Call it pride—anything, Robert. No; I have fixed ^u my new course of life already. And I tell you this, too, Robert: you must not think it is because I do not like you. No; if you had asked me the same question some time ago, I

should have answered very differently. You I always liked, Robert, and liked *better than any one else*, even so far back as Doctor Wheeler's days. But now it cannot be. Goodbye, Robert; come and see me and advise me."

He was silent for a moment.

"I think I understand now. I shall not say a word; but I did not expect this. If you would think it over a little; as I have waited so long, I can wait some time longer."

"It would be no use, Robert," said Diana, firmly. "I am determined on this course. My path is taken; and I shall do as I know my own dear darling would wish me to do. I must suffer my share and pay the penalty. So promise me, dear Robert, never to mention this again."

"Well," said Robert, sadly, "when in court I see the judge against me, they say I never push the matter, and so I shall leave it now."

With an assumed cheerfulness, which,

however, seemed genuine to Diana, he rose, and withdrew slowly.

Then Diana felt a complete blankness and desolation, with nothing to sustain her but the rather desperate sacrifice she had made. Such little pride as there is in such proceedings lasts but a short time, and begins to grow weaker. To have any satisfaction, these efforts require the presence of spectators, the lights, the scenery: then there is some indemnity.

There she sat, on that fatal night of the most fatal day in her little day, in one of the grand drawing-rooms at Starridge's; a home, indeed, far above her means, as she felt now. Poor, beggared, ruined little Diana! It was a cruel fate, and some of the old people said "enough to make her father leap out of his grave."

Everything was lost to her—wealth, love, hope—to name them in their proper *worldly* order. What had been life to her was fading out, for to those born and brought up if not in the purple, at least in the

“fine linen” and silks and velvets of life, all these decorations and this magnificence is as conventional as a fine landscape for background to a lady of fashion.

Diana cared little for gorgeous raiment, or for the rich dishes, the wines, the plays and shows, the castles and pictures—about as little as the most insipid fine lady going; yet, take these away, and *what was left?* Life was a jail—a prison-yard; it was indeed consigning this little heroine to the spin-house—cutting off her pretty hair, and putting her into the rough regulation dress of the establishment. How would she endure it? What was to become of her? She could not struggle or fight—she did not know how. She could not earn her bread. She had no friends—no one to call to for help. But though she sat there long with this dismal panorama spreading out before her, she was determined “to die first” rather than change about Robert Bligh. “I shall bear that punishment,” she thought, “and deserve it also.”

CHAPTER XVI.

MOTHER AND SON.

No less heavy was the blow that had fallen on Robert Bligh. He walked away listlessly—his mind now, for the first time, far away from the dreams of ambition which had so recently filled it. Calm and disciplined as was his nature, this rejection had come on him with a sort of surprise-like blow, as it were. He had never expected it, and something seemed to tell him there would be no recall of those words. As he wandered round rather listlessly, he heard the *gamins*, with placards pinned on to their chests, crying the *Regent Street Chronicle*; and in the orange-coloured notices, fixed down to the pavement with

stones, he read the announcement—"Verdict in the great Gay Case!" He bought a copy, and read,

"SECOND EDITION.

"Our correspondent at Bentham telegraphs that Mr. Justice Cosherer charged the jury in this case strongly for the plaintiff. He, in fact, hinted to them that there was little for them to do but to find for the plaintiff. He commented on the curious fact of their principal witness, Mrs. Bligh, not being submitted to a searching cross-examination, for it was extraordinary how she came to find herself in such an attitude. However, the defendant's counsel had not chosen to avail themselves of this right; why, it was not for him to say.

"Here counsel interposed, and said they were acting under instructions.

"His lordship continued to say that had been his opinion all through, and that the case had not lost anything in the able hands

of the learned counsel; still, it was a mystery to him.

“The jury then retired, and after an absence of a quarter of an hour returned into court with a verdict for the plaintiff.”

Bligh read this as he walked along. His eyes settled on the passage about his mother's examination. It was a mystery to him. What could they mean? he thought, for he knew Mr. Page was tolerably unscrupulous, and would not let the case suffer. He got home to his own rooms, mechanically turned over some newspapers that had come in, lit his lamp, and, through sheer force of habit, set to his dull evening's work.

Just as he had unfolded and smoothed out the first stiff page of a brief, looking up wearily, he became conscious of a tall figure standing before him—grim, pale, weird-like. He started, and half rose; then said, sadly,—

“O, mother!”

She said as slowly, and as sadly, “Well, Robert, the work is done. What I told you has been accomplished.”

“But what a work!” he said, rising and advancing to her. “What a wicked, cruel work! How can you lay it to your conscience to have thus ruined an innocent trusting girl? God forgive you, mother!”

“That is not between you and me, Robert,” she said; “your wish or prayer will not affect the matter. What I said I would do, I have done. Confess that you doubted it. My arm was strong enough to overtake her. I said she would rue the day that she trifled with me and mine, and she has rued it.”

“She never trifled with you or yours,” said he, warmly; “never. If she had, it was no excuse for such cruelty. What crime had she done? What was her sin? Don’t ask me to approve, or to forgive—”

“What!” she said, with infinite scorn; “has your head been so upset with these

little successes—these empty, worldly honours? I see. Or have you so little spirit—the same old tame endurance which will let you *still* put up with any treatment from *her*? Or be a shuttlecock—wait patiently on her whims and humours. Or, perhaps you are still tamed—still hankering after her. I dare say, if you were to try now, you would have a fair chance. To a beggar like her, you and your property might now be an object.”

Robert answered again, warmly. “This animosity is terrible. But you are right.”

She started.

“Yes, I have just come from that unhappy victim, and tried to make her the only reparation for the wrong our family has done her. It was you, mother, who made this a sacred duty.” She started back with a sort of horror; her face seemed to work in a convulsion; her long arm and hand beat off, as it were, something from her face.

“You did this ; you dared to do—to undo what I have done ! What ! you driving me into what I would not wish to do. Take care, Robert Bligh ! if I have sacrificed so much for this aim—I shall not stop there ! And you have dared to do this ? ”

“Yes ; but do you know with what result ? She has refused.”

“Refused ! All some trick, some coquettishness.”

“No ; finally, and for ever. She is gone away, and I shall see her no more. And do you know what I discover now, after all this elaborate vengeance ? that I was right, mother—right in what I said long ago. That if *we had only waited*—waited patiently—she would have agreed to accept me. Yes, mother, this is the end of your pulling down and plotting—you have destroyed us both.”

“No, no ! ” she said, passionately ; “I do not believe it. This is some more of her arts.”

“It is true, true before heaven; she has told me so solemnly, and I believe her. Yes, she has told me that she liked, even loved me, all through, but that she thought I did not care for her. And that, as I stand here, I believe to be the truth. Had you waited a little longer, all might have been well; but it is finished, and finished for ever. One of these days she will change, I trust; I shall live in the hope of marrying her yet, stripped of everything, as she is; but that is not the ambitious ending to which you looked. But that, I find, is far off. O, mother, mother! why have you done this? Is this the end of all your planning—wretchedness for *me*, for her, and for yourself?”

Who would suppose that this was the old, unsympathetic Bligh we have been following through the course of this narrative; the man, as he may have reasonably been set down, so phlegmatic, so indifferent? There was colour in his cheeks, there was

a trembling fervour in his voice, an agitation in his manner and gesture, everything that might have belonged to the warmest and most passionate of men.

Mrs. Bligh stood silent, gazing at him with wonder, overpowered, scarcely knowing him for her own son. As his cogent reasoning had so often convinced judges, so it seemed now to have the same force with her. She knew not what to say. She was overwhelmed. The lines of her cold hard face quivered as this castle came tumbling down in ruins about her. But hers was not a sort of nature to own that she had done wrong, or that could make atonement. She could not bow or bend, though she could break and suffer. As she stood there, before the lamp, she would have seemed to any other than her son a sort of baffled fury; and, when he looked up again, there was a blank void where she stood, and with a cry he rose up to follow her.

It was long before he could settle himself to his papers again. His mind was straying back to the great event of that day. Yet they were not over as yet ; the drama of the day was not concluded. Before another hour had passed, a letter was brought in to him, directed in a little “pinched” foreign hand, like the edge of a fine saw. It was very neatly and closely written, and he read it carefully through, smiling thoughtfully to himself as he closed it up. Of this letter the following is a copy :—

“DEAR MR. BLIGH,

“You will, of course, have heard the great news of our success, and that I am now rich beyond all my hopes. I cannot bring myself to believe it, but they tell me it is no dream, and that there is no danger of my losing again what has been given to me in so wonderful a way ; and yet, as I have often told you, I am not in such excessive spirits, nor am I overwhelmed with

happiness. I know I ought to be glad, as they tell me—yet my eyes look fondly back to our charming garden, my Amiens, and our dear French skies, and those good people who were so kind to me. These great streets, and gloomy walls, and crowds of houses, and greater crowds still of strange faces, chill me and make me miserable. Above all, Madame Saxe, who is my relation—of *her* I have a dread; I know not why, for she tries to be kind to me in her way. Now, of course, with these changes and responsibilities, I know not what will become of me. In this world, somehow, I feel very much alone, and strange, as it were. But what is worst of all—shall I own it?—I have misgivings, a weight hangs over me, and something whispers me that all this may be some juggling, and that at the end of some bright day, I may have to give up all again. Who can tell?

“How shall I come to what I wish to say!
How shall I tell it to *you*—how shall I find

words! You well remember that day when we first met on board the packet, when I was very low-spirited and wretched. Then I saw a face, whose calm, quiet air arrested me at once. It seemed to me to be one of a friend, and full of a gentle sympathy. From that moment something was whispering to me, 'These are not all strangers.' And I was right. For you came so generously, so friendly, to my aid, and saved me. I knew you would. I had a presentiment that you would. And from that moment, there seemed to be to some relation between us. Your kindness, your reassuring goodnature, which always seemed to say to me that I had one friend at least in this dismal country, and I was not wholly a stranger, and wholly cast out from sympathy. Since then, through all these hopes and fears, I have thought of that one face ever since. In my lonely room it has been before me always.

"May I come to you to-morrow early, or

will you come to me? Say which you prefer. I have something to tell you—to offer to you. You can guess, if you care to guess.”

Robert Bligh laid down this strange letter—not without some impatience—“What folly, what absurdity.” Yet he was not put out of his course in the least. It was no more than if some curious “bit” had turned up in the middle of a brief sent to him. He read it over again, thoughtfully. Then, after some reflections, he began to write a letter.

“You quite overrate the slight services I have rendered to you. They were such as any English gentleman would have done. So, if you could do me a favour, you will not mention small trifles again.

“As for your suit, I am afraid it is not for me to congratulate you. As you will know, your success must necessarily have brought proportionate misery into another house, and all the happiness it has brought to you it has taken from another. That, however, is

not your fault, and it only belongs to an action at law. She will bear her trouble with fortitude, and the bitterness is now almost past. The whole has been so sudden that I can hardly believe it, and I almost begin to believe what you yourself have hinted, that there must be something underneath all this, and out of the usual course.

“I do not see, therefore, why I should see you again, as I say I could not bring congratulations. You will now have plenty crowding to do that. I shall have to be busy comforting the fallen, who have need of it. Besides, my sympathies have been all through with *that* side. What you can have to say to me, I do not pretend to guess. So I thank you most heartily for your generous acknowledgment of very trifling services, and your kind sympathy for myself, who at this moment want a great deal of it—all, in fact, that I can get. And believe me I shall always feel deeply grate-

ful for the interest you have had in me, and will be glad if you will let me show it at any time."

Robert Bligh sent this letter away at once. He was not quite a stoic, it will be seen, and did not write with the philosophic severity which men of his character might be supposed to assume. He really felt grateful to this most foolish French girl, and could not be ungracious. After that, he dismissed it from his mind as he would a case, and went to bed. But he did not sleep much on that night.

CHAPTER XVII.

A NEW PROPOSAL.

IN the morning papers the name of Gay figured a good deal. One or two had leaders; and the *Semaphore* gave one of its characteristic commentaries—a “mingle-mangle” of classic quotations, and fine “word painting.”

“*Expende Hannibalem*,” it began; “or, rather, *expende* the career of the fashionable young lady of our period, whose day and night is one delicious flutter, and whose golden pinions bear her from ball to ball—from ride to flower-show. She does not sow, of course; neither does she spin, save when encircled by the nervous arm of some “svelte” warrior. Who shall blame her,

though whether of such should be the kingdom of Heaven, we leave to diviners to inquire. Yet it seems too heavy a judgment—quite too sore a penalty for the young and beautiful to be cast down, pauperized, stripped of all in a breath, and reduced to a privation which to *her* must be severer than the common privations of ordinary poverty. This moral is illustrated in the surprising romance of the Gay Court suit, and which shows us for the thousandth and first time that truth is stranger than fiction.”

This public painting of a moral was not the least serious trial for poor Diana. Indeed she had not seen the article in the *Semaphore*, though there were Samaritans enough of her acquaintance willing enough to direct her attention to it in some artful way. At the clubs, on the morning of which she has been one of the glories, it was talked of eagerly. The *fade* young ladies, her contemporaries, sim-

pered over it, and said, "It was dreadful, wasn't it? And *so she had no right to the place after all!*" As though these young patrician dames had been despoiled, under false pretences, of their smiles and nods, and insipid few sentences of greeting, which indeed was all that Diana was in their debt. Many a young spark cantering along by the side of his *dame* made himself more acceptable, as he thought, or perhaps less *ennugante*, by some details fresh from the club, and overlaid too with his own private varnish. Wally Pepys even—her old *soi-disant* admirer, "her slave"—as the battered, heartless old campaigner used to call himself—now sneered and jeered, and told his little stories about that poor fallen girl. Her poverty, in his eyes, was the most awkward, inconvenient, and contemptible thing in the world; and he had never met a poor person who was either handsome or refined, or worth talking to, which was his standard of

virtue, although they might have been amiable, virtuous, sweet, and gentle—things which, when combined with that deficiency, were of no concern to him. “A very free and easy young piece of goods,” he said, “and took wonderful airs when we come to think of it. I suppose she will be coming to us all round to recommend her as a governess or a matron to some place, or will have the old story of the private committee, and be pestered for our names. ‘A most sad case, my dear sir. We really must do something, or they’ll starve.’ I know the style of thing.”

“Well, hang it,” said a young man, warmly, “they had you often enough at their house. They were worth a dinner now and then.”

Some of the dowagers and matrons were secretly pleased. In this great battle of their life, their fashionable prayers and fastings, and working out this salvation for themselves, the best and most charitable

could only look on this struggle as one where there were so many prizes, fixed in number, so that it was eminently desirable that competitors should be diminished. One or two were deeply sorry.

Young Patmore was plunged into the sorest gloom and depression. He bewailed his fate and her condition. He had behaved like a brute. But what could a fellow do—a fellow situated as he was? He went to walk in lonely places, and solaced himself planning schemes for her deliverance. He even settled the amount—he thought a thousand pounds—which could be offered “delicately, you know.” But after much debating, like most of Viscount Patmore’s schemes, it came to nothing; and he thought it would be better to leave it as it was.

Bligh, for whom a load of business was always waiting, had to keep appointments, and “see people” on business. As he was hurrying along, after a hasty breakfast, he met Mr. Bowman.

“I was just going to you,” said he; “and am so glad I met you. I wanted to talk to you about our poor little Diana. My God Almighty! was there ever such a business? What will they think of it down there? Why, you might as well have thought of pulling down the Bank of England as of laying a finger on Gay Court. I thought it would have gone on to the day of judgment.”

Mr. Bowman was a true squire, as he often boasted, and firmly believed that, though squires and old families might sicken and even die, that old places were above the incidents of change.

“My poor little girl!” he went on, with deep feeling. “I love her like my own child, and since Maggie’s troubles, she has been like an angel. The worst is, there is no doing anything with her. She has taken up a stiff, self-sacrificing tone, and talks of going away, and living and dying abroad by herself. Now, my dear friend, you must talk

to her, for you are a rock of sense, and know how to speak, and all that, which I don't."

"I have tried, indeed," said Bligh, "but without the least success."

Mr. Bowman, now dwelling piteously on the case, at last brought him away to their hotel, begging of him to say something and use his influence with "the poor girl." Bligh scorned to let any conventional delicacy stand in the way.

He found Diana just a little changed — very pale, and with a light and fire in her eye which seemed to have come of long watching. There was a firmness and resolve in her air and manner which seemed to speak of some suffering or horrid suspense. She told Bligh that she knew all now, that she had heard from her lawyer, and that she had not spirit enough to stay here and face the mortifications of her new position.

"I will go," said poor Diana, "to Belgium, where it is, I think, they have those

ladies who live together, and try to do good out of the world."

"Yes," said Mr. Bowman; "that's it—a Beguine—you know, my dear child, it's absurd, and couldn't be."

"I am determined on going, Mr. Bowman, and shall go next week. All I ask is to get away from this place."

"I know not what to say," said Bligh, deeply commiserating her. "You will not be persuaded by me."

Now entered Mr. Page, with papers—come to talk business. He was glad to see Bligh, and he began eagerly to talk over the case. Mr. Bowman went away. But Diana grew not a little restless, and seemed eager to change the subject of their talk from that. Mr. Page spoke dismally. "Most unfortunate business," he said; "but we were fighting with one hand tied behind us. If we could have cross-examined that witness—though she was your relation, Mr. Bligh—"

“Allowed to cross-examine!” repeated Bligh, in astonishment—and seizing the point of the allusion—“why, was that the reason, O Diana!”

“No, indeed,” she said, “that is—but how could I? No, that had nothing to do with it.”

“But it had,” said Mr. Page, impatiently; “the judge said so. However, it is all at an end now.”

This disclosure quite confounded Bligh—such a sacrifice for him—from this poor, generous girl.

“I don’t quite give the thing up yet. See, Mr. Bligh; persuade her.”

“Give me those papers I mentioned to you. I am convinced the name Potter was there. O, that should have been looked to! I was busy and hurried, and had not time.”

Diana answered indifferently that it was no matter. But Robert Bligh, growing surprisingly excited for one of his tempera-

ment, pressed the matter so eagerly and warmly that he at last wrung a reluctant consent from her that she would let him take the papers away, and allow him to look over them.

Then followed the busy day—the Court, the house, the committee-room—the weariness, mingled with an excitement which alleviated so much of the weariness. He hurried home, snatched a morsel of dinner; he then set to work at his hodman's labour. He sat on, using his legal shovel rapidly and with energy; throwing up the mould about him, and getting through his work with great energy; and was about to rise to hurry down to the House, when word was brought to him that a lady wished to see him. The next moment Miss Eugenie was before him.

“I have come to you,” she said, “after your letter—your cold letter. At least, so far as I can understand it.”

Robert Bligh, a little embarrassed, and

seeing perhaps what was before him, was not "scared" into an impatience, nor did he forget his invariable gentleness and gentlemanliness.

"Perhaps I did not understand," he said, "or assumed more than was meant."

"Yes, you did," she answered sadly, "and I can see that you never cared for me—ever so little even—and that *now* you *despise* me."

"You must not think of such a thing," said Bligh, kindly. "I both admire you and feel grateful for the great honour you have done me, and of which I am most undeserving—"

"I know—I know all that," said she, with a little impatience. "I understand these compliments. And you can be so cruel—even this mortification you might have spared me."

"Would to Heaven I could," said he, "or rather there is no mortification in the world. You have offered something which any

man would accept, and I among the number—that is, could I do so. But now, will you bear with me a few moments while I speak to you as a friend that likes, and has a sincere interest in you? Now, you will remember at the very outset, I told you you could not reckon on me to take up your side of this business, and that such influence and sympathy as I possessed must be with your opponent. She deserves infinitely more, you will confess, now that she has been defeated and has lost all.”

“Ah, yes; and your heart is with her—*she* loves you, and had she prevailed, would have done what I did.”

Bligh shook his head and smiled.

“No, no; far from it. She is away—out in the world—leaving us for ever. No; I fear she does not care for me.”

She fixed a penetrating look on him.

“Answer me, then, this one question. Promise me, only one, and I shall never trouble you again—never.”

Bligh had the true barristerial instinct, and guessing what this was, did not answer for a moment.

“Ah, you refuse me everything,” she said, bitterly.

“Tell me, have you offered yourself to her? I have no right to ask, I know—”

“Well,” said he, “it is better to tell the truth—I have. But from my childhood I have always looked to her, since I was a mere schoolboy; for her have I worked all my life—to her have I looked—for her has been my success—and for her, should she persist in this fatal resolution, shall be my fall, I fear. For I can take no more interest in the successes or honours of this life. There is the whole truth.”

Who could suppose that this was the old Robert Bligh, supposed to be so cold and self-interested?

“Can you be surprised, then,” he went on, “if even, after what has passed, I find myself wishing her success, and working

for her interest? Forgive me if I tell you that this victory of yours seems to me too sudden—too abrupt, to be substantial. I have a presentiment that something yet will come to light—and even this night I am going to devote to some new investigation of the matter, which I must wish may bring a change. It is only fair and candid to tell you all this, though I know it seems ungracious on my side.”

She remained silent for a few moments.

“They told me all this,” she said, “and I ought to have guessed it. Now I understand at last.”

There was another tap at the door, and his servant came and whispered to Bligh: “A lady, sir.”

She caught the words.

“A lady!” she repeated, eagerly.

“Who?” said Bligh.

“She has brought a box of papers, and is coming upstairs.”

“It is what I was speaking of,” said

Bligh; "this is the business. I must give myself to-night—"

"And it is she?" said Eugenie.

"Yes," said Bligh, hurriedly; "the one, recollect, whom you have vanquished, despoiled."

It was Diana who now entered, and started as she saw the other. She remembered her at once. She knew not what to do, and stood on the threshold, hesitating—in her old fluttering way—not knowing whether to go back or come forward. It might seem a situation that Bligh should have prevented at all hazards, and could have done; but he had a faint notion that something might come of this meeting after—at least, nothing worse for Diana could happen than what had occurred.

Eugenie, looking long and earnestly at Diana from head to foot, said at last—

"Ah! so we meet. So you are Diana Gay? I am sorry for you, but they tell me it is only my right."

“If it be so,” said Diana, gently, “I do not grudge it to you; and it is hard that you have been kept from your inheritance so long.”

“You can be generous,” said the other, looking at her steadily. “But who knows? He says it is not over yet; and I may still have to make the same speech to you. He tells me plainly, his wishes and his work, and his sympathy cannot be with me. They belong to you, *whom he loves*. Yes, he told me so — whom he has loved, and for whom he has lived — for whom he has won all these honours since he was a child. Why do you not like *him*?”

“Everything has ended for me in *this* life, and I go to begin another. I have brought the papers,” she said to Bligh. “Don’t be alarmed,” she added, turning to Eugenie; “they will do *you* no mischief. That I am confident of. Good-bye. Don’t think I feel the least anger to you. You

have only obtained what is your right.—
It is not for me to stand in the way.”

The other took her hand, clasped it warmly — and, with a sudden impulse, pressed a kiss upon it. Then, with an impulse as sudden, abruptly cast it from her, and stood haughtily looking at Diana from head to foot.

“And I too stand upon my rights. I ask no compliment from any one. What has been given to me, I have won fairly and by the laws of the land.”

She then turned and slowly left the room. Diana now, as it seemed to Bligh, grown strangely grave and serious, said hurriedly, “I have brought you these, not that I believe there can be anything found, but lest you should think I should not wish to do what you ask me to do. And now, dear Robert, I must go. A million of thanks for all your goodness and devotion, which I have been quite unworthy of, and which I ought to have acknowledged long, long ago ;

but I was a child then, up to a few weeks ago."

"But why do you speak in this way, Diana? I shall see you again, often; I have so much to say to you."

"Because I may go at any time, the sooner the better. I am longing to get away from this scene. For now, Robert, I begin to find the mortification very bitter—the people I meet, and their looks—"

"But what *is* to become of you?" said Robert, actually passionately; "you cannot go out in this world by yourself; you must not, you will suffer and perish. O, Diana, think, think a moment of what I said. Consider it again; you are leaving me to misery—though *that* I do not care about—but also a misery and wretchedness that is all concerned for you. You may refuse again as plainly as you like, but I do conjure you, think again, reflect, have pity on yourself and on me. Surely there is no necessity for this miserable self-sacrifice; in your in-

nocent life, there is nothing to atone. Stay, Diana, stay with me and share my prosperity and success, such as it is."

Diana listened with wonder to this new strain. She seemed irresolute, and he saw the old smile of delight on her face; but she had recalled her old resolutions, wished him good-night hurriedly, and had joined her maid who was waiting in the hall.

As Bligh turned back abstractedly into his study, a letter was brought in to him. It was from the House, and from the "whipper-in" of their party—to use the familiar designation drawn from the country field, and adopted of its own motion by that august body. It was labelled "most pressing and immediate," and he had to jump into a cab and fly express down to the House, where he remained two dull hours.

The division was over by midnight, and he got away at last.

In half an hour his lamp was drawn close, his great tin box open beside him, and he

was thoughtfully and earnestly looking through letter after letter. Many of the bundles were quite new to him—accounts, dockets, agricultural letters, bills even—for the Gay family seemed to have been scrupulous in preserving every paper. It was a long and tedious search, and more than an hour passed over before he came on the “lode” which he had discovered when down at Gay Court. So the time went. Just as the clock struck one, he started up with a cry, and his servant, who slept below, heard a *sound* as of a trampling and excited pushing back of a chair, and heartily “cussed” the interrupter of his slumbers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DIANA ON THE WORLD.

WITH the morning—and bright and hopeful as the morning itself—Robert Bligh was at the door of Starridge's fashionable private hotel. Its pure plate-glass, speckless, seemed each like an entrance to dark and unfathomable caves of fashionable life. There was a general glistening air, and the genteelest of private gentlemen received Bligh's application in the hall, with a soft deprecation as who should say, "Do speak low, please; for you can't imagine the number of titled persons there are upstairs."

"Miss Gay, sir? and Lady Margaret, sir? and Mr. Bowman, sir? Yes, sir. O yes, sir. So sorry: they all left this morning."

“All gone!” repeated Bligh, “and Miss Gay! and where—”

“Yes, sir. O she went to the Cawnt-nent by the Horsetend boat—”

“Gone to the Continent!” Bligh was aghast. “But you have her address?” he said.

The private gentleman shook his head sadly, and smiled sweetly. Bligh then hurried away to her solicitor, and found Mr. Page in. That gentleman was in his usual airy spirits. He said, “Mr. Bligh, a really melancholy business. Yes, she’s gone, wished to go privately and without taking leave, and all that. She was here last evening, and insisted on the costs and charges being made out, roughly of course, and paid everything.”

The scene now changes to the dull Belgian line of railway, on which the trains amble along, and come jogging into monotonous stations where

there are no platforms, but where honest rustics with baskets, and traders, come running from the roadside in a vast hurry, and cluster at the steps of the carriages as though they were about to crowd into an omnibus, and there would not be room. These vehicles come so comfortably and depart so quietly, as though drawn by safe and steady old horses.

Beyond the station rise strong, tall houses, of a yellow or pinkish complexion—sallow and unhealthy looking—with “Estaminet de Station,” or “Hôtel du Chemin-de-Fer” in faint letters, whose colours have become smeared and have run, from the trickling of the rain. These pale-complexioned houses straggle off, we know, to a town, and most likely that town is either Ghent or Bruges.

On that threshold the feeling is sure to be one of depression, even for the practised traveller; but for the timid stranger, to whom a foreign country is new—women,

girls who are friendless, and are cut off from their own friends, and are cast adrift—that first *débût* in loneliness, under such conditions, is the most dismal thing in the whole, and wide, world.

In a slumbering Bruges street, where the houses were of the prevailing dark yellow, lived an elderly, single English lady, Miss Robinson, who had been there for many years, and who let lodgings to the English, and to the English only. She, herself, with all her long residence—and she was a tall, stiff, wiry, prim woman, with a considerable power of mind—declined to receive natives on any terms, having a true contempt for all foreigners, which grew with every fresh year's residence. She kept herself apart, always talked of England, compared every article—needles particularly—with imaginary English standards of old years. This lady, some twenty years before, had been a governess to some relation of Lady Margaret Bowman's, had lost her "savings" in

some decent and very "pious" country bank, who almost made it a favour to take deposits, and had been driven over to Bruges.

To her one evening arrived a very timid young girl, seated in the railway omnibus with her maid, whom she had been expecting. She received them very austere, saying she was always happy to do anything for Lady Margaret, or for Lady Margaret's family, making a concession, as it were, of thus letting her apartments. She said she expected to find Miss Gay—for it was that young lady—much older, and hinted at a possible want of steadiness.

She showed Diana into the apartments, clean, bright, shining, without a speck, garnished with some purely English ornaments, a fire screen, a small vase of English china, an English table-cloth, rather faded, and which had formerly adorned rooms let for lodgings in the mother country.

Miss Robinson had not the whole house,

but other guests lived in it, while a bonnet maker lived in the shop below.

Diana's window "gave" on the street, and she saw from them the white row of houses opposite, with their yellow "jealousies" all blank, many stories high, the muslin blinds drawn close; and a great tall closed *orte-cochère*, with a huge oaken double door.

Verv few passed down this quiet thoroughfare, and at a butcher's shop, where there were two or three tiny morsels of meat within glazed windows, the owner sat at the door alone and read his newspaper all day long. There she would be able finally to shut out that dreadful night of England, and the passing friends and acquaintances, the very sight of whom was a jar. As she passed in her cab through London, a glass went to the eye of a gentleman riding, who started and thought how reduced she seemed to have grown. "Going about in a cab," he told his friends,

“ I declare, yes.” She had at last got free, at last got away, severed every tie, was at last engulfed in the great waters of obscurity; and here she was now, on the first evening, sitting in her room trying to read, sitting at the window as dismal and miserable as girl’s heart ever was in this world.

What was the course she was looking to? what had she planned? Perhaps she had a faint hope that she might soon wither away, and fade out altogether in the struggle. She thought that might be the happier issue after all. But in the meantime she had determined to supplement her little pittance by the aid of her own honest labour.

The poor child had, *of course*, determined to seize on that plank that always comes drifting by, in family shipwreck. No matter how ignorant, how unsuited; the reduced lady always thinks herself equal to teaching children or girls, brings herself to it with reluctance and agony, and thinks that mere consent sufficient to ensure success.

Yes, Diana Gay, the former heiress of Gay Court—the light and airy butterfly of fashion—whose life seemed to lookers-on, as indeed it did to herself, like the gorgeous existence of the Queen of Crystal Delights in a pantomime to children in the boxes, had actually brought her young mind to the stern resolve of going out as A GOVERNESS! Yes, in this foreign city she would teach English to the French children, such little music as she knew, drawing also she thought—taking stock of her not very powerful accomplishments. A wild dream, that poor pretty child—that stood herself in need of a governess—going round to the houses to give lessons!

Yes, this poor child had come to begin life at Bruges—a kind of penal servitude, indeed. She had often heard of families being suddenly reduced, and having asked about them long after, had been told, with a shaking of the head, “O, they are gone, you know, to live at Bruges.” Hence it

seemed to her that residence there should follow almost as a matter of course, and that the new life she had fixed upon must begin at that settlement. Her reformation, she thought, could not be worked out properly unless it commenced at this official seat. To it her little heart tended; she longed to get there. Yet she little fancied, like a pretty maid servant applying to a severe matron, with "gentlemen in the family," how austere would her proposals be repulsed. Yet she was longing, eager to begin, dying for the occupation which would enable her to kill the past.

Her first day, then another, dragged by. A faithful maid—a little girl from Gay Court, who had refused to desert her like the rest of the world, had gone with her. This was her only support in her struggle, for struggle it was to be, and her only arms. She wept a great deal. Her pale, delicate cheek was growing flushed and fevered. With her austere landlady she did not find

much comfort. She was Scotch—grimly Calvinistic, yet not without a good heart, over which, however, had grown a thick, hard shell of pride and spirituality—a sort of moral ossification, in fact, which hindered its proper motion. When this state of things had gone on for some time, she therefore came and gave Diana some sound advice, bidding her “lean upon the Lord,”—consolation which only frightened instead of encouraging the poor girl.

A couple of days, and she went out dreamily and hopelessly. As she was beginning this new shape of life, she might go through all due forms. Outside or inside was equally indifferent to her. Her faithful maid was with her—that Polly from sweet Gay Court. Polly had warmly described some of the wonders of the old city, its amazing churches and town halls, whose magnificence, whose sacred and crusted Gothic elaboration had appealed mistily even to her rustic heart. She saw what

there was at least of vast labour and marvellous stone cuttings, and the reverent air of age always impressive. The old belfry had struck her most. "It beat," she said, "the Tower of London." She took her mistress to see these various shows, who surveyed them listlessly. For those under a trouble—the recent death of one much loved, or of heavy anxiety—beauty loses all its charm. These things were so many masses of hewn stone. As they passed away from the belfry, they came near seats that were under some shady trees, and where a few people were sitting. Polly, whose eyes were ranging about, seeing something to admire in every direction, gave a start, and called out, "O, miss! if that be not——, no! but it can't—or else he be very altered."

Diana looked and saw an elderly gentleman, much bent, and leaning on a stick, and looking about listlessly. She remembered Mr. Lugard, the father, at once,

and ran forward. The sight of a familiar face in that desert was like warm sunshine. As she came up, her small hand out, her voice faltered with excitement, and uttered the words, "O, O, Mr. Lugard!"

Dark lustre eyes were turned dully towards her, with a curious look. It was only after a sort of start he seemed to recollect, and uttered, with a little difficulty, "O, Diana, Miss Gay! So you are here, in this place! What on earth—"

"O, I am so glad to see some one," said poor Diana, "some one that I know, in this lonely place."

"An infernal hole, Miss Gay, but we must put up with it. My health has been very bad, and I have suffered a great deal this last winter. They have absolutely nothing here, no attraction, no decent people—a few broken down English. Ah, my dear child, to one who has lived in London, and in a fine country, with the

hunting, and the good old stock, it is an awful, awful change."

Diana on another occasion would have said, "But why come here?" Something, however, whispered her the reason. Indeed she was indifferent and incurious enough. Something of the old colour was coming back to his cheek. "Mrs. Lugard, you know, is here. I believe you never met her yet. She is an invalid, like myself. We are not, in fact, as rich as we used to be." Then Diana remembered having heard from Richard Lugard, that "the rich widow" his father had married had been, in the story of the clubs, "a take-in." He had merely married a long schedule of debts.

"But it was not *that*," he continued, answering what he justly fancied was in Diana's thoughts. "Do you know what has driven me here, to this infernal hole? That fellow, my son. Nothing else, under God! The blackguard has ruined me—

went and married a creature whose father has become bankrupt. That was his own concern. But what right had he to drag me in, putting my name on his bills? I ought to have let the matter be exposed before a police court, only I knew those wretched people wouldn't take the trouble to distinguish between my name and his. It was Lugard—that was enough. God help me! To think of my coming to a wretched hole through an infernal scoundrel who had neither wit nor sense nor brains—a fool whom I got into Parliament, and who couldn't keep in—an ass who has made a botch of everything in life! It sickens me even to think of it, and to think of myself being kept in prison—in a hole not fit for an English gentleman to live in. When I think of the old days at Gay Court—I was thinking of them as you came up then, and of that morning when we gave *him* the picture, and I made him the speech—”

There was a pause, when suddenly he

turned to her. "You, I suppose, are travelling—going on in state to Hamburgh, or Paris, or to some of those places. 'Miss Gay and suite' in *Galignani*. And poor old Margaret—she was hit hard, poor woman! How is Gay Court? Ah, Miss Diana! you are well off; but mind whom you marry. I wished you to have that fellow, but it is the best for you as you are."

"O," said Diana, "then you have not heard. The case went against me, and I have lost all—"

"*What!*" said he. "O, there was to be a trial—I remember now. And do you mean to say that you have lost? What! Gay Court gone?"

Diana's face was turned to the ground, and she did not answer.

"My goodness! what are we coming to? Turned out of Gay Court! And what are you doing here? Have you come to live here?"

“I am obliged to, Mr. Lugard,” she said. “I have but little left—and there is no disgrace, if I could only see the way, in trying to earn one’s bread.”

“*Earn one’s bread!*” he said, rising with difficulty, and leaning on his stick. “Earn one’s bread! What do you mean—you—”

There was so much conviction in this tone—so much contempt, also, as the truth seemed to dawn upon him—that Diana felt quite timorous and humiliated. But she answered steadily,—

“There is no discredit in honest labour, and I hope to find some way.”

“I suppose as a governess. God help us all! Then I conjure you, reflect a moment. Think of an old family like yours, and don’t bring it into discredit. I could do nothing for you, I tell you plainly; I can’t go begging and interceding. Why really, only yesterday evening I was telling the Consul here about Gay Court, and how the thing was kept up; and now I must tell him the

owner wants to be a governess! It's too absurd."

"I am not asking you for anything," said Diana, with dignity. "God forbid I should have occasion."

"O, I don't mean that," he said, "but I tell you plainly this place won't suit you. There is no money for teaching, and no one wants to be taught; so I would change the scene if I were you."

This heartlessness gave Diana a very chill in her heart, and she withdrew without a word, and without hearing Mr. Lugard's muttered complaint "that they were now to be overrun with paupers, it seemed."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FÊTE DAY.

ABOUT this time there was to be high festival held in Bruges, on the occasion of the opening of some great institution by the King—the late excellent Leopold—who was to come from Brussels, and in whose honour there were to be *fêtes*, and a competition of the *Concordia*, and other singing societies, illuminations, and other shapes of rejoicing. The whole town was astir—workmen were busy; and Diana's own Polly had caught a little of the excitement. She had an admirer already in the person of the *traiteur* from whom she got their slender provisions, and she eagerly brought in word of the great preparations that were being made.

She was not more than seventeen or eighteen. There was an English "gentleman's gentleman" at the Hotel, who had seen her, who told her that "the affair would be very creditable on the 'ole," and announced that he himself meant to participate therein. He mentioned a little "feat" in some gardens, where there was to be dancing and feasting, as especially worthy of approval.

This in no way concerned Diana, who was listlessly and morbidly thinking of that one aim—how she was to work, and thus begin to forget the past. This inaction would be but the very threshold of despair.

The morning was now come; it was only the fourth day since her arrival. It was a Sunday, which gave a ready-made text to Miss Robinson to enlarge on the "sinful doings of those pious benighted 'Belgums,'" as she called them, "who had no care for their poor miserable souls!" This frightful depravity did not awaken Diana,

who was utterly indifferent to all that was going on. For now the delighted Polly had flown down with news "that they were coming!" and the strains of bands, and the hum of voices in the streets, with the marching of feet, was still more significant warning. On it came—a brilliant procession, set off by the scarlet hanging from the windows, and the more effective, full, healthy faces of the honest Burgher women. First the riflemen, in jager hats and green plumes, their breasts hung over with medals, their banners carried within punts, so large and heavy were they; then the singing societies, their banners literally studded all over with medals, and looking almost like a coat of brilliant mail; then music, distant and coming near; then soldiers, and more banners, bishops, clergy, and the Burgomaster and his citizens. So they went by, in this state, on one of the loveliest and sunny days conceivable. And it made Diana—who was stopped at a street

corner by the passing pageant—yet more dismal; for it seemed like one of the delicious old Gay Court hunting mornings.

They passed on to the institution, where they formed in a hollow square, and the King and all his court came and went through their programme—whatever this was—so thought Diana, indifferently enough.

As she came away listlessly, and gallant officers clattered by, she heard a voice of astonishment before her; and some one who had passed her hurriedly had looked back and stopped. “Good gracious, Miss Gay! *you* here?” It was Mr. Canning Bowman in a vast hurry, and full of importance.

“Why, what on earth,” he added—then stopped. “I heard it all, you know—that is, my father wrote to me—so sorry, I am sure.”

There was a restlessness in his manner, and his face was looking anxiously forward. Poor Diana was rejoiced to meet this

friendly face, though under such mortifying circumstances. With her old confidential way, she drew close to him—the Bowmans were *such* friends always. “Yes,” said she, “there have been changes since we met. I will tell you why I am here, Mr. Canning.”

He was still looking out restlessly. “Fact is,” he said, “I came over here from Brussels for these *fêtes*, to meet the Brenners. You remember Mdlle. Brenner. They are to be at the ball to-night, and I am going to meet them at their hotel. I am sure they will be sorry. I shall certainly come and see you at the first opportunity.” And very restless still, he shook her hand, and, without asking her address, hurried away. Surely mortifications were being crowded on this poor little head of Diana’s.

The day drew on. To her it was like a dream. Then there were prizes to be conferred—more medals to be hung on the banners; and the day stole by very quickly.

The enthusiasm of the little maid Polly was extreme ; and in the evening she had news of a yet greater *fête*—illuminated grounds, a dance, and a serenade of His Majesty in the pretty gardens under the windows. In the same passive way Diana agreed to go ; and indeed she had already begun to shrink from the rather grim monotony of the austere lodgings to which she had bound herself.

It was a lovely cool evening, and the lights were twinkling in all directions. The air was soft and balmy. All the crowd was hurrying in one direction—to the illuminated gardens, on which the great rows of windows, where the feasting was going on, were blazing with a rich soft light. Thousands of faces were turned to these glorified windows. From below them was wafted the softest strains of music from the wonderful throats which were accompanying delicious voices with marvellous simulation of orchestral instruments. Close

by were the trees; and through the trees were twinkling lights; and here was the great platform where the town was dancing; and round were the bowers, and the little tables where so many were feasting happily. So do foreign nations enjoy themselves with tolerable innocence.

The night thus passed on. By-and-by the upturned faces were gratified, and the gorgeous effulgence of the great bow window became of a sudden crowded with dark figures; and Diana heard great guttural shouts of delight as the lieges saw their king. She stood under the dark trees, watching the bright figures glistening in fitful motion. Presently came up the English "gentleman's gentleman." Having found out Polly, and respectfully got on equal terms, he asked—for his "hinstink" told him that Diana was "redoosed"—for one short dance.

When Polly was gone, Diana looked on without moving, and had noticed a figure

posting to and fro quickly, looking at this and that group, and passing on and coming back. After a long interval, it came by near her; and something in the shape and outline seemed to be familiar to her. Suddenly his face came full into the light—a wild, questioning face. Diana knew it. At the same moment hers was revealed to him, and he had rushed to join her.

In this wilderness, the joy, the happiness of meeting one who felt for her, made Diana forget all that had passed between them; and with a cry of delight, she flew to Richard Lugard.

He was in a sort of rapture. “My dear, dear Diana,” he said, “I have found you at last. I could not stay longer. Some Providence directed me to you. What are you doing in this place? Why have you come here? What is the meaning of all this? Sit down here and tell me.”

But now Diana recalled her last interview, and she drew herself away.

“O, you should not have done this; for I cannot listen to you now.”

“But you must listen to me first, Diana,” he went on, in growing excitement. “You know what has happened since you left. Had you only put confidence in me!”

“But what do you do here?” said Diana, now alarmed at his wild eye and excited manner. “Why should you have come here?”

“Because I could not stay—after *you*. Because I heard that you meant to work and labour for your bread—as they say. *You*! Those dear delicate fingers! Never, Diana! I could not endure that notion.”

She was touched by his interest in spite of herself.

“O, Richard,” she said, “I know you mean well; but—”

“But listen to me,” he went on, “just for one moment. I implore you, for the sake of old days, when you were kind, and indeed were yourself. Look at the state you

are in, Diana. Look at what is before you. The misery, the struggle, the certain ruin ; for you cannot fight the battle. You have not strength, nor have you been accustomed to it, and will be overwhelmed. I have foreseen all this, Diana, and my heart bled for you ; and to save you from such a fate I would ruin myself—before heaven I would ! ”

“ Yes, I would,” he went on, in growing excitement ; “ and here is the proof. When I thought you were leaving us, I sat down and wrote to you—what I felt, Diana, and what I wished to do. It was a desperate letter, and it had been better you had not seen it.”

Diana, quite terrified by his manner, growing wilder every moment, looked round for escape ; but his hand was on her arm.

“ You must let me finish now,” he said. “ Yes, Diana ; you must know all that I have been content to lose for you, and would lose again. Yes, she found it, and

that evening went away to her family. I am glad of it; for it was a life of hell itself."

Diana could not say a word.

"I rushed to the agents; my commission is for sale or sold, and I have come to you. We shall begin life again, Diana, as we ought to have begun it long ago. But it is not too late. I have given up all for you—you can give up a little for me—who have had only one thought during all my life, and that one, you! My carriage is in the courtyard at the hotel, ready—the horses put to—the world before us."

At last she could speak.

"O, let me go! Some one save me!" she said, faintly. "O, this is the worst of all; and you can insult me this way again!"

"Insult you!" he said, setting her free in his wild astonishment. "I that have ruined myself for you!"

"Let me away; I shall die if you stay near me."

“And *you* say this to me? Ah! if you could but have seen him. No; he dared not have come to you.”

“What!” cried Diana; “then he is here. O, where is he? O, tell me quick. Bring me to him; he is my only—my true friend.”

“*You* say this! Take care, Diana. If I thought for a moment that you cared for him—’Pon my life I begin to think you always did. But *that*, as I stand here, I could not, I dare not trust myself to see.”

“Do leave me,” said she, fluttering bird-like in his grasp. “Do go away.”

“No, Diana; I cannot give you up. I have sacrificed too much for you. Come!”

It seemed to her that she *must* go; and that she dare not disobey. Again she faltered,

“What is to become of me?”

CHAPTER XX.

THE RESCUE.

“ FEAR nothing, Diana ; I am here to protect you. Take my arm. There.”

A strong calm voice said these words. Diana’s little hand was on that arm in a moment.

Lugard almost foamed at the mouth.

“ I saw you at the packet, though you did try and hide and wrap yourself up. How dare you spy after me ? ”

Bligh did not answer him.

“ Come away,” he said to her. “ Fear nothing with me ; I shall take care of you. And you,” he said to Lugard, “ do not dare to follow. I heard what you proposed ; and after that your presence would be contami-

nation. Speak yourself, Diana ; it is necessary."

"O, let me not see him ! Let us go, Robert."

Lugard gave a sort of frantic cry, and, putting his hand to his breast, half drew out something. He checked himself. Then, with an effort at calmness, said, "Just two words, Robert Bligh, in private. Don't be afraid."

Bligh went to him without hesitation.

"For the present I pass all this by, as *she* is present. But you must swear to meet me in the morning. In this country these things can be managed."

Bligh seemed to hesitate.

"It will be worse for you if you do not. I owe you much since that day at Wheeler's—how long ago now ? By heaven ; you shall pay here, and before twelve hours are over ; or else, there are ways in this country to—"

"I promise you," said Bligh, excitedly.

"You may depend on me. It is time this should end."

"O, I am so glad, Robert," Diana whispered, "so glad you have come back. I should have died, I think, if this had gone on longer. I find I have no mind—no resolution, after all."

They were walking round the illuminated gardens. The dancing, the music, was going on.

"No," he said; "I was afraid that would never do. You are not called on to enter on such a life. I was thinking all these few days how you must have suffered."

"But I have deserved it all—I have indeed," said Diana. She felt that her tears were coming.

"But there was no need," he went on gently, "of such haste, was there? I wished to have time to look through those papers."

"No matter," said she. "Do not let us

talk of the past. O, it is so delightful to me to meet a friendly face—”

“I did,” he went on, in the same reflective tone, “find time to go through that case of papers. There was such a quantity of them to look through, and my eyes are not of the best; but I succeeded in finishing the task.”

“Indeed you have always been kind to me. And how long are you going to stay? or are you going on to travel?”

“But you do not ask me,” he said, “was my trouble successful? did I find anything? You should have trusted me—believed in me. I did find some very important letters in that box—”

“I dare say,” said she absently.

“Letters which, if they had been produced at the trial, would have set the case in quite a different light.”

“Well, it is over and done with,” said she, “and for ever; and we shall not talk of it any more.”

He stopped in front of her—looked into her face.

“No, my dear Diana ; it is *not* done with for ever. Thank God ! no. Providence has taken care that one so gentle, so charming, so good as you are should not suffer so cruel a punishment. Can you bear to listen to some surprisingly good news—”

“O, Robert !”

“That, having found these precious papers, they completely establish *your* case ? Can you bear to hear more, Diana ? That, thus armed, I sought those who have turned you out, and their advisers ; put them in possession of what I knew ; showed them our hands, as it were, and—”

“O, Robert ! Is all this a dream ? Am I to be a little happy again ?”

“Yes, Diana. What you were before. Just the same ; with something less, indeed ; but—”

“O, Robert ! Robert !” she exclaimed, in a perfect flutter, “there is no mistake ?”

for I could not bear another change—a fresh casting down—”

“No! no! It is fixed. I have their writing signed and sealed. I saw her. I saw her solicitors. I showed them that with these papers we could begin again, and with a perfect certainty of success. The young girl behaved nobly, and most generously. The woman with her was furious; but the young girl persisted. They have indeed no case; but in your name I ventured to propose a compromise, allowing her a small annuity, and which will indeed be a cheap release from further law and vexation.”

Diana could only utter, “O, Robert! O, Robert! This must be all a dream. After all this wretchedness and desolation of these few days, I was ready to have sunk down and died.”

“That is all at an end now. Perhaps you will enjoy these blessings now the more on account of that suffering.”

So the hours passed on. They heard the sweet music at a distance, and saw the lights glittering. It seemed to her the most delicious music—the lights like those of fairyland—the faces the kindest and sweetest of the world. Such is the halo delightful news and sudden happiness cast round everything. Years after she looked back to that night as the happiest in her life.

They walked about still talking.

“You must come back at once,” he said, “away from this, and begin the old life once more. I must leave in the morning at daybreak. I have got into this weary slavery of ‘getting on in the world,’ and dare not stop. Politics now shall be everything to me. For that I must live, and lose everything. That excitement is delicious, and once fairly enthralled you forget much—everything you wish to forget. So they tell me. That is to be the one aim of my life now. And I have a tolerably

strong purpose, and shall carry it out. Others tell me it is all Dead Sea apples, full of dust and husks. I suppose I shall find out at the end, when perhaps it is too late—who knows? ”

During this speech Diana's face had been glowing, and her little heart fluttering, and the words, hurrying to her lips, stopped at that delicate threshold and crowded back again. Now the people were rushing past them, for the roar of fireworks that were to end the night had set in. Already the glow of red sulphuric fire was lighting up twenty thousand faces all turned in one direction. He felt her arm trembling in his. He looked down to that gentle face glowing in the light.

“Robert,” he heard her whisper, “when I saw you last I know I gave you much pain. I did not mean to do it, but was obliged—and—and—*I felt as much myself. Now, I could not refuse what you then proposed.*”

CHAPTER XXI.

HAPPINESS.

Now the fireworks were over. The last set piece, with its gold and silver fires, its inscription in a blaze of glory, "*Vive Léopold!*" had sputtered and cascaded, and finally smouldered out. The lieges had gone home; the riflemen were heavy with drink; the glorious night was over. Diana, with her heart like a bird's, now laughing, now crying, was busy with her little maid putting her things together. She was so happy, poor little thing—never indeed to be so happy through the whole of her long life that was to follow. If among the dispositions of life some such privation could be contrived, temporarily, analogous

to putting a hearty voluptuary on bread and water for a week, we might thus negatively learn to appreciate blessings we are now a little indifferent to. The little maid, Polly, was as happy as herself. The grim servitude of the governess was gone for ever; nothing but happiness was coming. And to Polly she can confide another secret which the night had brought.

Not less happy the "cold" Robert had returned to his hotel, thinking over these wonderful changes. Nothing was more exquisite than the contrast of the poor lone, exiled girl, wasting out of life almost, and the alteration which his news had wrought. It might seem almost too melodramatic, this sudden alternation of fortune; but there had been no exaggeration. The vivacious and almost omniscient *Regent Street Chronicle* let the public into the secret almost as soon as Bligh had told Diana. That very evening's impression of the agreeable journal had a paragraph like this:—

“It seems we have not yet done with the existing *cause célèbre* of Gay v. Gay. Trusting Britons who believe in the verdicts of juries as final things—as sacred a thing in its way as a text—will receive a rude shock by learning that the whole is likely to be reopened. Justice, in short, has not been done. New evidence has been discovered—there will be application to ‘the full court,’—not after dinner, of course—a new commission ‘sped,’ fresh fees, new briefs, new consultations, in short the old process of legal oyster-opening, and, it must be added, of legal oyster-eating. It seems that a very distinguished barrister, who is also a member of Parliament, took a fancy for looking through some of the family papers, and came on an old correspondence which clearly sets out *another* marriage—a previous one, and under equally disreputable circumstances. A marriage in every port, like that of the British tar, seems to have been a weakness in this

gentleman. Only for persons in his class there is hardly such extenuation. It is said to be inscribed under his own hand, which makes everything charmingly satisfactory."

The journal had certainly hit on the truth. It almost seemed as though it had mysterious familiars engaged, who had been present in Bligh's study on that recent night when he had been busy searching through Diana's papers.

It was a weary task, and seemed a hopeless one; but he gave to it nearly his whole night. Nothing is so wearing as this searching and deciphering of crowded small *female* handwriting. It even pained his eyes. It was not until the grey of the morning that he came upon a hand that he seemed to know—some half a dozen letters tied up in the middle of another. He turned to the signature of the very first he opened, and found it was his mother's name. There was the name "Potter," the English chaplain's, which he had seen before,

dotted over the page; and here too were other letters, and one or two in a foreign female hand, and one very long one in feeble handwriting, signed "Walter Gay." He bent forward to the lamp and read first his mother's. If the *Regent Street Chronicle* could have been looking over his shoulders! It was a short letter too. It was addressed to "Mrs. Gay, of Gay Court," and was dated from Boulogne. "We are still nearer," she wrote, "and before I write again we shall know something. Walter is ill and nervous about himself, though not in any danger. Since that creature left him he begins to see what she is—God knows, late enough! It was wonderful my falling in with that fellow Potter; but the moment he passed Walter in the street I saw that they had known each other. The moment, too, I felt a napoleon in the letter Walter gave the maid for him I suspected more. I have had my eye on them both, and I can see they feel a dread. O, I do feel we are

working in the cause of decency and honour, so outraged by this scandalous business. If it had been my own child I would have cheerfully sacrificed—if I died for it—one who had so little regard for the decency and honour of his family.

“P.S.—I shall not spare money, you may depend on it. That Potter is to be bought.”

He took up another letter. No. 2 ran (it was also from her):—

“‘That Potter is to be bought,’ I wrote to you last. He *is* bought, and not very dearly. Just what we suspected. He was chaplain at Aix-la-Chapelle. I can see the dread of him in Walter’s face, as he lies there ill, and I can hear his imploring. This man suspected me when I first saw him. He had heard that Walter had married an heiress with enormous wealth. That had drawn him from the mean slums in which he was burrowing. Depend upon it, we shall discover something, and, after all your sufferings and mortifications, your good old

family will be rescued from the disgrace this unfortunate creature has heaped upon it."

Robert Bligh leant back in his chair, and looked thoughtfully upwards. He never started or showed outward surprise or astonishment at any event. He took No. 3, and read on. It was the usual common form of breaking bad news, though it was done in a businesslike way:—

"Poor Walter died last night, with all his disgraces and troubles upon his head. In the morning he had taken it into his head I was going away, and he wrote me the letter I inclose, in which he all but confesses what we suspected. There can be no explaining this matter on any other construction. With his death I knew we should have all from Potter. *The other woman was alive when he married this wretched French creature. A little more money, and Potter will get us certificate—everything.*"

There were many other letters, chiefly from Mrs. Bligh, but all detailing the advancing stages of the business. Finally he came on the certificates, one of marriage, one of a death, and on a last letter from Mrs. Bligh:—

“As for his child in the convent, she must be left there. She has nothing to do with us now. They will be glad to keep her: they have had more than ever was paid for such a worthless bastard; and if they like, they can turn her into a lay sister, and make her drudge. In this country the thing is so common that that is the regular way for dealing with cases of this kind. At any rate, you are done with her for ever, and dear old Gay will not be desecrated.

“Now, what I advise is this: all to be kept a profound secret; let the whole die out gradually. We cannot suppress this story, but now poor soul himself is gone. But, thank God, it is no marriage—a vile

connection, and so you can give out : and if the busy gossips want particulars, and say, ‘Why, we thought it was given out and acknowledged,’ just contradict them at once, and give no explanations. If they have any doubts, let them move in the matter. Then it will be time to prove all. But thank Heaven all has ended so happily. For safety’s sake destroy all I have written to you. But put by the certificates, which are more precious than gold. Now you can look out for an heiress for ‘steady John,’ the heir and hope of Gay Court.”

Bligh thought he almost heard his mother speaking ; yet she was young then. As he finished, his hands covered his face, and it was long before he recovered this cruel shock. His mother, that he thus loved, being so transported with hatred as to descend to this fearful vindictiveness and injustice !

With the morning he was with the solicitors on the other side, and had told

them what he had discovered, and that the whole matter would have to be reopened. He did not, of course, "show his hand," as the phrase is, but he told them, calmly and plainly, that the chances of their holding their verdict were very slight, a statement that made a deep impression on the partners, for they knew Mr. Bligh—that he "spoke by the card," and had no "bounce" in him. They were fair, open, honourable men, standing high in the profession as family solicitors, and not inclined to "make costs."

"If it be as you say, Mr. Bligh," one said, "of course there might be ground for a compromise."

He was then tempted by this tone to let them know a little of the grounds. He sketched out the outline of what he had discovered.

"Better speak to her," they said; and he hurried off to the plaintiff in the now famous case.

When Robert Bligh reached the house

where Madame Saxe was staying, he found it lit up, with sounds of music inside. It had the air of a party. No doubt she was celebrating the victory. As he entered he heard the noisy, monkey-like chatter of foreign voices within. He wrote something on a card, and sent it to Miss Eugenie Gay, telling the servant to give it to her privately. In a moment Eugenie had come out to him.

“Come in here,” she said, and led him into a parlour. “She has asked people here to-night, and I must appear to be gay and merry. She has brought in all these strange people—and, O Mr. Bligh, I wish we had never come here. They say to me, ‘You are now mistress of this place, and of vast wealth;’ but I shall be miserable, I know. She and they will do what they please with it.”

“I came to speak to you about that,” said Bligh gently.

She started.

“What, you have thought over what I so foolishly said? O, if you knew the shame I felt, what must you have thought of me!”

“Thought of you?” he repeated. “That you did me an honour I was totally unworthy of, and which, had it come at another time, I should have been proud and happy to have acknowledged. But now shall I tell you what I have come to you for? It is again about this law-suit.”

“I am tired of it,” she said impatiently.

“Then I have less scruple in telling you what I am about to say.”

He then began and told her all that has been so lately told to the reader—his discovery; the new chances *in* Diana’s favour; and, finally, delicately hinted at what he had hinted to the solicitors. She listened with a flush rising in her cheek.

“You are still in *her* interest, and now would take from me, for her sake, what

the law has given me. You are a warm friend and ally, Mr. Bligh. But don't you think this is expecting a little too much from me?"

"I know and feel how it looks," said Bligh, "but it is as much—or nearly as much—in your interest as in hers. I know pretty well what litigation is, and how miserably it will end if it once sets in. All I say is, consult your friends, get the advice of the best lawyers, and I shall let them see what has been discovered. If you do not, I must tell you plainly you are sure to lose all again."

"What is this counsel?" said a sharp, shrill voice, and madame was standing before them. "Lose all again! Who will make us lose, pray? O, Mr. Bligh! is this the game?"

He was not a little embarrassed. The look of his embassy *was* a little awkward. Yet he felt he must explain now, and he did so, as he had done to the young girl.

The Frenchwoman listened with undisguised scorn and contempt.

“This is your story, is it? Very clever and very well contrived. Then you may return, and tell her from me it will not do—that no trick of the kind shall take from us what the English law has given to us. There, Monsieur Bligh, I say. Why do you intrude into our concerns? What title have you? What are these plots? Come, Eugenie,” and she took her arm, and half drew her charge away from the room.

Now, this position was certainly disagreeable for Mr. Bligh; and these servants of duty and principle are often thus misconstrued. No one had latterly begun to feel this so much as he himself, and at that moment the reflection occurred to him, as his mind stretched back to the ball at Gay Court, in the old, old days, when every one was saying to him that “he was so wise” and “knowing,” and that “Mr. Bob would always fall on his feet.” It seemed to him

that somehow speeches of this sort were the only return he received for these "Quixotic" good offices.

Suddenly the door was opened softly, and Eugenie stole back.

"Never mind her," she said; "I shall do what you wish. In the morning I shall write to you. After all, it will help me to get away from this wretched land."

Before the next day had passed over a basis for a compromise had been sketched out. It was agreed it should be left to the arbitration of Mr. Bligh, who would provide well for the plaintiff in the case, subject of course to the consent of the defendant. With this agreement in his pocket he started at once for the Continent, and, arriving at Ostend the night of the fête, had seen and raised from death to life the poor little outcast Diana, and was now returning home to his hotel—so happy!—in a delightful dream. What was he think-

ing of? Was it that, after all, the “game,” as some would call it, of good sense, honour, and, above all, restraint, is not such a losing one, whereas that of impatience, “high spirits,” arrogance, and hurried gratification of every whim and wish is perhaps a stupid “game”—often an unsuccessful one? Then he suddenly recollected his promise to Lugard. It had been given in a moment of irritation, and he felt there was no withdrawing from it. Coming in on his pleasant dream, it seemed like the horn winding out in *Ernani*, just after the marriage.

He was at the *porte-cochère*, and he stopped irresolutely. In the mood in which Lugard was then — disappointed, baffled, full of rage, hatred, and fury—he was not likely to listen to reason or moderation. As he entered under the white and glittering arch (it was the Fountain Hotel) the “patron” came up to him hastily.

“There was a gentleman here—M. Lugarde—who arrived from England this evening. We heard him mention your name very often.”

“Yes,” said Bligh impatiently; “I know. I suppose he was looking for me. Where is he?”

“O, I am so glad, M. Bligh. We did not know what to do, and it is most awkward and painful; and really in the interest of our hotel—”

“But what do you mean?” said Bligh. “Has anything happened?”

The host looked round confidentially, and dropped his voice.

“He is of good family, I believe, and is well connected. So we thought it better, as he was a friend of yours, to have no noise or confusion until we saw you. But it came on so sudden. I assure you at first the language he addressed to me—I was sending out for the police—seized me by the collar—when madame my wife called,

‘*Mon Dieu !* Don’t you see—he *is mad !*’ He is out here in the pavilion with two men. Go now, monsieur, as you are his friend. I must request you will see to it. I have behaved with all delicacy, but I cannot have my house compromised.”

Without a word Robert Bligh followed him to the pavilion, and there saw the unhappy and unlucky Richard. These storms of rage and disappointment and ungoverned fury, which he had indulged in through life, had, at last, rushed into this new and more fatal channel. The old race and struggle between the two rivals, which had dated from the old school-days at Wheeler’s, had been thus finally ended. Our hero might now have it all his own way, and finish as he pleased. It was hard for poor Lugard, who had some fine and redeeming qualities; and it may be said in extenuation that much of this frantic temper was but an anticipation of this final visitation—a disease, as it were, and therefore excusable.

CHAPTER XXII.

DISPOSITION OF THE CHARACTERS AT THE
FALL OF THE CURTAIN.

Now it is time to close this history of a young girl, which set out with sunshine and golden clouds. Those bright, warm days did not last, as we have seen—nay, could not. The rude weather set in, and the young girl found she must take her turn with the rest of the world on the rude highway. Few of her age could have had so many troubles crowded into a small space. They had nearly overwhelmed her, but they proved a wholesome discipline and probation. She was “fixed” and steadied, and that agreeable pastime of making toys and things to play with of other people’s

love, devotion, honour, suffering, fidelity, as though they were mere "stage-play" virtues, put on to last no longer than the ball or party—the very *earnestness* of the whole adding so much to the "excitement"—had been driven away and never returned. It was all lightness and want of thought; but it was, for all that, a dangerous sport.

What follows is almost conventional. A very handsome arrangement was made with the daughter of Walter Gay—some seven or eight hundred a year settled with all form on her—and she went back to her dear France again. Then it became known—through the *Cuckoo*, we believe—that a certain marriage had been "arranged" between Robert Bligh, Esq., M.P., and Miss Diana Gay, of Gay Court.

Diana herself, a perfect heroine of romance, was seen again in the Row, and it was wonderful how the faithless gathered again about her. She was the "most charming girl;" the dowagers thought her "so in-

teresting!" After all, "What a story! It ought to be written, my dear." (So it has been, as the patient reader has seen.) After all, a little adversity is welcome; it makes everything so precious. How dear, how sweet seemed life and its charming blessings to Diana now! Repulse before victory makes victory doubly splendid. She had her own engaging manner, which she shall always keep, gracious to all. Only one little act of spirit she felt it a duty to perform: she "cut" Viscount Patmore—"cut him dead." She had heard, too, certain things about the pleasant Wally Pepys: some of his ill-natured speeches had been reported to her;—and when that fashionable time-server came up in his smug, confidential way, with his scrap of French and his tame jokes, meaning to have many a week down at Gay Court, the young girl coloured, and told him, half jesting, half serious, "that he was never more to be officer of hers." In vain he tried to smooth matters; our Diana was

inflexible—polite, but indifferent; and now, as you meet the old sneerer and growler shambling up from the dinner-party, and unguardedly mention her name, he will begin to snap out, “The little *intriguante*! My good sir, I believe the real heiress of Gay Court is in France at this moment. She contrived to jockey the judges and lawyers. It isn’t so bad a *rôle*, my friend, to stick to the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General.”

What presents came pouring in! for she had plenty of real friends who rejoiced in her fortune—friends who loved and regarded her. The list thereof reads temptingly in the fashionable journal, in the column devoted to such inventories. The gorgeous things, the jewellery, the superb laces, the ingenious bits of uselessness designed cunningly out of the most costly matters; the “blotters,” which it would be a crime to “blot” with; dainty candlesticks, dotted and crusted over with bright

stones and tracery, and which it would be “worse than a crime” to light; little caskets — “things to lie on your boudoir table;” “*Thèières*” china, dressing-cases, dressing-bags, articles of Paris, chairs, tables, desks, “services”—in short, stores sufficient to stock a tempting Palais Royal shop.

Diana was delighted with these testimonials, as being, in most instances, pledges and tokens of regard. In some, of course, they were merely the homage which fashion exacts from the donor—a tribute to his own credit and magnificence.

The treacherous tergiversating *Mercury*, down at Calthorpe, thorough Vicar of Bray of journals, was in raptures at all these things. Its files give fatal testimony to its fickleness. Such a paragraph as this reached to effrontery:—

“Every well-minded person will rejoice in his heart of hearts that this noble old place still remains with the brave old fa-

mily, through the gallant and peerless young lady who has fought her fight so gallantly, and defeated the schemes of a parcel of foreigners.

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, but men decay."

This was inappropriate, as well as dishonest. But Diana only laughed at the *Mercury*, and was a faithful patron, and when its reporter came up to London to "inspect the presents" (four columns are devoted to an accurate "limning" of those articles) the officer was received with all honour, and entertained at "a sumptuous repast" in the parlour. He came once more, on the great day when he and the higher functionary who attended for the fashionable *London Chronicle* met together. What a list of grand names! each succulent as a French *bon-bon*: lords and their ladies, ceremony by the Bishop of Irnston, the

Rev. Doctor Brindley, the Attorney-General and Lady Jane Williamson, the Solicitor-General, the Lord Chancellor, the Lord Bellman, Viscount Chimeleigh, and Lady Margaret Bowman, the Premier (who made a speech), Serjeant Bullock—but it would be wearisome to give the catalogue. Away drives the new carriage; the “old shoe,” launched by a facetious friend, describes the usual parabola behind them; the bright face of our Diana is seen at the window, and Mr. and Mrs. Robert Bligh, of Gay Court, are on their way down to Gay Court.

Soon it will be Sir Robert and Lady Bligh, for he is to be Solicitor-General and knighted in a few weeks; and the *Mercury* tells us “steps are being taken to revive the old Gay baronetcy.” One of these days—but they are a long track of years away—he will become Lord High Chancellor, and a peer of England, by the style, perhaps, of “Baron Gay of Gay Court;” but then Diana will be more thoughtful and fuller in

face and presence—a lady of fashion, with daughters coming up about her, and Sir Robertratherworn and dusty, with a hundred Parliamentary battles fairly won, and a few lost,—as when he was opposed and defeated at Calthorpe, and was out of Parliament a whole two years; when he and Lady Bligh travelled on the Continent, and saw the great cities, and went up mountains, and sat out in the evening, and forgot there were such things as elections and politics. Long after, when he was restored to the old “ring,” they looked back wistfully to happy evenings. Sometimes they talk of the past, and Diana—who always keeps and will keep to the end that pretty manner of hers, only shaded off a little—talks of “poor Dick,” now, it is feared, utterly incurable, though he has been under treatment for years.

Now they talk of Mrs. Bligh, and on Robert’s face comes a shade of trouble. Since *that* breakdown she has not been seen. Proud as ever, she disdained to yield,

to own she had done wrong, to forgive or ask forgiveness, or to see the faces of those she had once loved and once hated. In some remote county, in some lonely town, she grows old, and grows harder and more grim every day, and nurses that old resentment—the resentment of defeat—until she thinks the end will come, the rude bell clang out, and she will die as she has lived. Her son, her daughter-in-law, have made humble attempts at conciliation—pilgrimages even—but all in vain. She keeps herself inclosed, and will not look in their faces.

So Diana moves on in her old beauty, her old gentleness and liveliness, with a little ambition at her heart; but because *he* is ambitious, and waiting for the grander honours to come which shall reward his battles and labours.

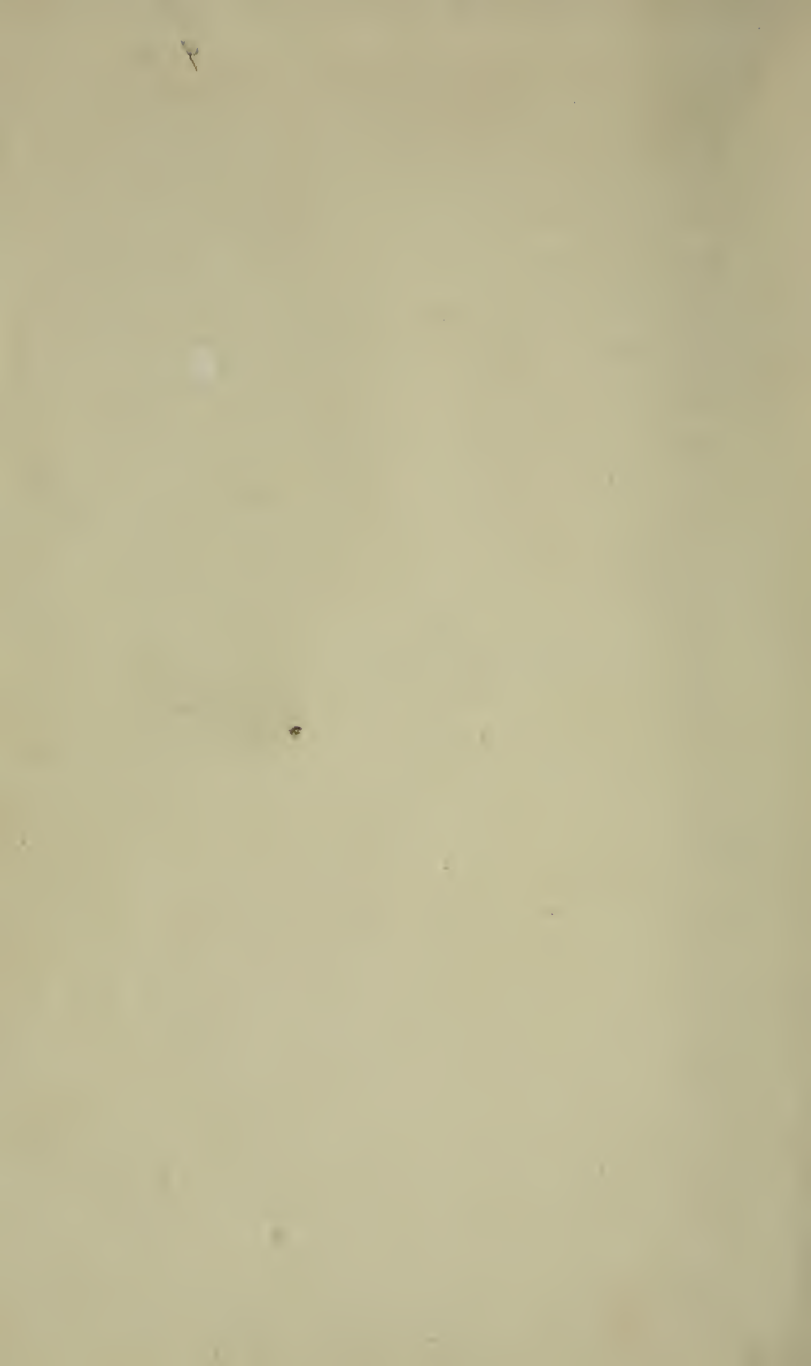
The fiery scarlet of Squire Gay's great hunting picture is mellowing down. Often as she flutters through the room, she moves

more slowly, looks at it wistfully, and as she goes off kisses a small hand to it, with a sigh as she does so. The room seems to fill again with the old images and figures—the hunting morning, Richard and his rival; the horses are seen in front, on the lawn; D'Orsay is being walked up and down, and the cheery voice of the squire rings out. She is not much changed after all; for as she garners up these old scenes faithfully and jealously, she garners up unconsciously the image of her old self, and remains in the eyes and hearts of dear friends the old DIANA GAY.

THE END.

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